THE HAVEN

DALE COLLINS

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By DALE COLLINS

ORDEAL

A NOVEL

SEA-TRACKS OF THE SPEEJACKS

THE STORY OF THE FIRST MOTOR-BOAT VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD

WM. HEINEMANN LTD.

THE HAVEN

A Chronicle

By

DALE COLLINS

"*. . . unto the haven where they would be.*"

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To

JOHN

My Brother

A note

I FEEL justified in publishing this chronicle—intimate though it be—because it reveals the real Mark Antoine and his attitude towards the adventure which befell him on Maedchenbrueste. Other accounts have made him appear as the central figure of a romantic comedy, the hero of a melodrama, and so forth, but, whatever grounds there may be for these views, his own record shows his character and the happenings in which he was involved in a new and strange light. Much of the following will cause surprise among the host to whom Mark Antoine was a shadow, for even those of us who knew Mark Antoine, the man, had not recognised the peculiar quality of his mind, but to all it will be obvious that he set down the truth as he felt it without distortion other than that which is inevitable when a case is seen from a single angle. Some may find the soul betrayed in these pages that of a foolish fellow posing even in his most secret thoughts and rightly doomed to mockery, but others may see it as that of a magnificent visionary striving against Circumstance, and steadily advancing until he came to fulfilment. I have given this book a title applicable to Maedchenbrueste, and also expressive of the hope I cherish. I have done so, however, because I was his friend. For the same reason I have resisted the impulse to judge Mark Antoine and his story, leaving that to more impartial minds.

D. C.

THE HAVEN

A Chronicle

CHAPTER I

I

I AM Mark Antoine, the handsomest man.

The judgment is the world's, not mine, and I make no boast for I am here to forget it. There is nothing for the individual to be proud of in such a title. It is one acquired by birth, and it carries responsibilities and disadvantages as well as privileges and benefits. In my case the element of sheer luck is high. Had I been born fifteen years earlier there would have been no fortune in my face, and to-day I might have been an ageing lion-tamer out of employment.

It is an odd fancy—particularly odd coming to me—but this place, this Maedchenbrueste, begets such fancies. That is why I have started a journal. When I return to the world I may forget the strange traffic of this isle solitary in the midst of sea and sky and wind, and that would be a loss.

I write on the veranda in a pool of lantern-light, outside which only the night and the stars are visible. The stars are large and hot, seeming to throb, to expand and contract, rather than twinkle as they do in other skies. The wind is an unbroken rush of sound, giving a sense of tremendous energy, but there is no suggestion of life as apart from the unified life of all creation. Every frond on the thousands of palms is swinging and clattering and rustling. Upon the outer reef the Pacific thunders with an even, numbing roar like a distant bombardment. The mind is stirred and at the same time lulled. The constant flow of energy knows no diminution and no effort. Wind and sea go on, steadily and surely like time.

Over the night, over the isle, over the brain, over the whole world the spell of the ocean falls. It is our gaoler and our friend ; it imprisons us in solitude and it gives us peace. The isle is so small that it seems like a ship, but this ship of Maedchenbrueste sails for no port and is untroubled by the ocean yet for ever in the ocean's keeping. Until there is no more sea Maedchenbrueste will remain isolated and secluded in its bowl of blue. The atmosphere has a peculiar quality which sets the days apart from all others. Looking out into the windy dark the world is incredibly distant. Samarai, off the coast of New Guinea, which is civilisation's outpost, is three weeks' sail away, but no measurement by days or miles could do justice to the distance which lies

between. To conjure up the world is to look back at life through the curtain of death. People, events, interests and scenes beyond the horizon lie outside this existence.

Only a week has passed since I landed from Captain Smyth's schooner, but already Maedchenbrueste works in me. It is balm and tonic; it washes the dust of cities from me, so that I seem to be seeing and thinking clearly for the first time. I have never thought before as I think here; I have never seen the business of living in perspective because I have been too close to it, too involved in it. Here, thank God! I am not an actor, but a spectator. And what a relief it is—what a blessed imperative relief!

The fact is my nerve had gone. I was threatened by a breakdown, and not a polite breakdown to be remedied by a few weeks in a fashionable hotel masquerading as a sanatorium, but in a real smash-up which might have landed me in the mad-house. The world tour did it. The strain was too much—a Roman Triumph going on around the globe; adulation, welcomes, flattery, tributes, receptions, speeches, and always new faces pressing forward, new eyes staring, new lips shouting greetings, until the senses cried out for mercy. Always Jenkin going ahead, sounding his drum, ringing his bell, crying in the wilderness that Mark Antoine was to follow. Always Jenkin marching on, working up false enthusiasm which quickened real enthusiasm—plying his

trade of stirring the great heart of the public—announcing the happy gospel that Mark Antoine who had been no more than a shadow was coming among these fortunate souls, coming to visit them in flesh and blood, stepping down out of the heaven of the screen into their midst. What a purgatory of triumph! What a hell of success! The women—the millions of women—young and pretty, old and fierce, clever, foolish, but all anxious to see Antoine, all ready with strange tribute, all crazy about him. Mark Antoine—the golden calf—the adored of the ladies!

I am not pretending that modesty or any saving virtue revolted in me. I had striven for this. I loved it. It was my career, my life, breath in my nostrils. There was no girl so young and silly, no woman so old and mad, that her flower flung at the railway station was not worth acknowledging with a smile. The women—always the women—and I was their slave far more than they were mine, because they had made me, they had raised me up to this. The men were interested, amused, treated me like a freak or a tailor's dummy, envied me, when they met me tried to behave as if I were human. But the millions of women! No actor, no conqueror, no king had ever had such a triumph as this shadow who took on flesh and blood for the multitudes. They could not have had it; there were frontiers to their kingdoms, limits to their popularity. My triumph was a thing of the modern

world, impossible before the invention of a toy against which neither race, nor language, nor creed prevails. In this country a sportsman might be an idol; in another a statesman or a warrior—but Mark Antoine was a famous citizen and the hero of the people's romances everywhere. In all civilisation there was no audience so benighted that if the low comedian made a grimace and declared that he was Mark Antoine he would not get a laugh.

I repeat I loved it, but the cumulative effect was overwhelming. I came to this town, I was fêted and worshipped, and passed on, becoming a shadow again. But in the meantime the same thing was happening in the next town, and to the same man, with the same brain, body, heart and nerves—to me. It is a fantastic, horrible dream on this veranda. The break came suddenly, in Australia. The Australians won. I was surfeited, gorged, bursting. Jenkin had gone on to prepare the way to the East, and I was in Brisbane awaiting a boat to take me on to further feasts. I thought I would run up to New Guinea, into the wilderness, to regain my breath. At Samarai I found Captain Smyth, the benefactor. When Samarai thought I had gone South again, Smyth had smuggled me here on his schooner, and here I am, as safe, as free as if I had escaped into a new dimension.

I suppose I have no right to be here—no right to have run away. That is the odd part of being who I am. An opera singer, a painter, a composer, a

writer, even an actor, is allowed to have a temperament, to have what, for the want of a better term, may be called a soul. It is expected of him. But though half the world cherishes us shadows we are only allowed scandals. We may divorce, dope, drink, even do murder, but we are not expected to be subjected to the aspirations and desires of other artists. We are always suspect, and, for all our popularity, are still as the stage people were once upon a time—rogues and vagabonds. I am expected to make love, but not to love; I am required to look beautiful, but must not feel beauty. If I declared I really loved, or that I worshipped beauty, no matter what oaths I swore it would be branded as a "stunt," even by my friends. The hateful word haunts me here. Gauguin and Stevenson did as I am doing, and were understood. I should be laughed at; everybody would know I was only seeking publicity. It is peculiar.

Not that it matters—nothing matters which belongs to the other world. The insects hazing about the lamp are a greater trouble than all the tragedies, injustices and tears of the life from which I have stepped, and out of which I shall remain until I hunger again for the feast. It is a feast, of course, and I shall soon recover my appetite, but until then I love this place.

It is so quiet. Wind and surf go on, but they are part of the night—not ordinary sounds. It is as if a painter had contrived to record sound on canvas.

That does not quite express it, but I am getting out of my depth. To find that words can say even as much as these to-night, however, is a discovery. Back in the world the only writing I had time to do was the signing of my name over and over again —with a flourish. Maedchenbrueste is different. I shall write it all down as well as I may, and then when I have to go away I shall take with me a living record stronger than memory.

2

Herr Adolph von Bohn, who built this house, has my sympathy. He was a German Pacific millionaire —a big man, fat and heavy but keen. He knew these seas as he knew the back of his own hand. Maedchenbrueste was the isle of all the isles he chose for his home in retirement. They say he drove the kanakas hard and also drove hard bargains, but he must have been a poet to select this place. He set a stone house on the hill, and the cost was great. He did not care. The tropics possessed him; he had forgotten the Fatherland.

The Fatherland punished him, indirectly. War came. I should have thought this tiny dot lost in the sea might have been overlooked, but it was not so. Herr von Bohn was too big to escape. He was interned; the Australian Government seized his estates, and expropriated him as an enemy subject. Maedchenbrueste is Captain Smyth's now. He bought it cheaply—from the Government. I do

not know where Herr von Bohn is, but I bless him.

The house is a big, bare, white bungalow. It has been through hard times, and its furnishings are scanty, but that is no hardship. After centuries of expensive hotels it is restful as a monastery. The veranda is the best part of it, for from there the whole world is visible—the whole world which still exists and which has not been drowned in the ocean. The house stands on one of the twin hills which give the isle its name. Maedchenbrueste means "maiden's breasts," and the hills are just that. They rise smooth and round and pure and soft, and the palms which cover them are so close together that nothing of the earth is seen. There is only the swelling sweep of the fronds which are never still but move in unison, nodding and swaying, so that the hills seem to have life, seem to breathe. The slopes run down to a beach gleaming white with coral, a ribbon between the blue-green of the palms and the fresh green of the water. The lagoon is not still, but ruffled and shimmering, and is embraced by the reef. Upon this reef the waves roar, flinging up fountains of spray, white and misty, encasing us in a silver net. There is only one entrance, and into this the rollers charge, but the wall in which they are piled is always subsiding. The waves coming into the quiet of Maedchenbrueste seem to feel the need for rest; they sink down, hushed.

Beyond the reef the sea runs, deeply blue, touched

here and there with foam. It extends in an undulating plain to the sky into which it blends, the blues running together in a silver shade, so that the horizon does not suggest infinity, but rather appears to be the point at which the two elements are welded into one. Maedchenbrueste is the only piece of land of any size in this great expanse of ocean, but dotted about it are some few pin-points of rocks or breaking water. The sun blazes upon all this beauty with a fierce, intense light, which is golden in the morning and the afternoon but at noon is white. There is not a cloud in the sky; gulls drift over the outer reef. To live in such surroundings is like living in a dream. The beauty is perfect and complete. Of course, there are sharks in the lagoon, vermin on the beach, spiders in the greenery, and such things, but Maedchenbrueste remains as near to Eden as man is likely to get this side of that other sea. It is the Pacific isle of fancy, and it is real.

There is no sign of Captain Smyth yet. He should be in at any time with the gun and other stuff he is bringing me. He will call once a month, though, looking out at the wall of sea and sky, I don't know how he will do so—the blue looks solid.

He is a queer little man—quite a character—surprising and unusual, simply because he is so absolutely commonplace. He might be a storekeeper in a small town, a humble and somewhat disappointed storekeeper. His eyes are blue and very faded, as if the sun had bleached the colour

out of them ; he wears a small, straggly moustache ; he is small and round-shouldered, humble of bearing, deferential. One can hardly believe he is the skipper of an island trading schooner. They say that he has been out here all his life, and has done many strange things. I find him obliging to a fault, generous, reasonable and excellent in every way. He, too, loves Maedchenbrueste, and will settle here when he sails no more. He has a way of sucking his moustache which is irritating ; he has worn it into thin, grey wisps.

There is one odd thing about Captain Jacob Smyth. His schooner is a neat, two-masted craft, which he handles with exquisite skill, but she has no name. The whim seems a little cruel, for it sets her apart from her sisters, a child of shame. It is quite a shock to see her bows and stern with no bright lettering. Captain Smyth has a stock answer to the question which follows.

" A fancy of mine," he explains in his mild little voice. " She is all I have, and if I gave her a name she would have an identity apart-like from me, but while she has no name she must remain ' Captain Smyth's schooner.' "

It is sound logic, and rather pathetic. One would not think he had it in him. He never raises his voice above a whisper to his crew, but they are as docile and as quick in responding to his will as if he were the most ferocious bully. There must be more in him than one would guess. He has been in my

thoughts a lot these last few days. I shall be glad when he comes back, and I know he has carried out my instructions about Jenkin.

3

I have escaped from the whole-time job of living, and it is doing me good. This is my birthday, and for the first time in thirty-one years I am enjoying privacy. Somewhere the hurly-burly of life goes on, the lights are bright and there are no secrets and no peace, but here there is dark night, no one to spy, no watching eyes, no intrusion, not even any books, no past and no future, just the present, the wide universe and Mark Antoine, the only soul, as much lord and master of his earth as Adam was. I feel happy to-night. I had been wondering whether the result was going to be kill or cure, but I believe now it is going to be cure. I am blundering along, but I am getting somewhere. All my life I, with the rest of the world, have been watching and approving a shadow Mark Antoine, but I knew a man cast that shadow though I had not the time or the decent privacy or the respite to learn what he was like.

Ah-lee was massaging my legs when I remembered that it was my birthday. The room was cool and calm, dimly lit, and through the window came the ceaseless song of wind and surf, very musical and soothing. The stars looked in. Despite the rush of the wind the air was soft and heavy. A moth with

downy white wings fluttered about the lamp. A pleasant sadness pervaded the room, because the sea holds this house in thrall. It was a good hour in which to recollect a birthday; nothing happens here; nothing will ever happen; thoughts flow as easily as a stream.

What a crowded thirty-one years, passed amid swarms of people, always watched, stared at, applauded, occupying the limelight and dazzled by it. The everlasting scrutiny began the day I began, and the stage was set with tinsel from that moment. I was born in the caravan of a small travelling circus which my father owned. He was a big man, a lion-tamer. Like most of the old jokes that are almost folklore there is truth in the fancy of the lion-tamer who is afraid of his wife. My father was, because he could not understand her. She wore spangles, she rode a white horse—but she was not of that world. There was French blood and Irish blood in her, and she had dreams and aspirations. My father would have allowed me to follow in his footsteps, would have fitted me for nothing else. She had me educated.

But all this by the way. The point is that almost upon this day thirty-one years ago, the clown grinned sadly and declared I was the finest baby he had ever seen, the gymnasts stared at me and said I should be strong, the lion-taming father stood in the background and twirled his moustache. They all looked at me, my mother said, and all admired

me. I can picture the scene well enough. The glare of the acetylene lamps coming in through the open door, the shadow of the big white top, the clatter of the people arriving for the evening show. I was born to it.

And so through the years. Next the country lads and their wenches in a bank of faces beneath the dim dome, and Mark Antoine there, in spangles as his mother had been, entertaining them, the observed, the object people wished to see, paid to see. And even when he walked down Main Street the curious eyes following him.

So through the years, always stared at, always performing, always climbing into the view of a greater throng who wished to be amused. There is no need to write it all. I came through the vista of crowded scenes to the Mark Antoine of to-day.

I considered him as if he were someone else, but knowing all the time he was I. In every corner of the globe, in places the names of which he had never heard, his shadow lived and posed for the millions. They applauded him, they wrote to him, they dreamt about him. The elect jeered, but that could not change the truth that he, and some of his fellows, occupied a greater place in the hearts of the peoples of the earth than the noble dead or the mighty living. I looked at this shadow man, and saw he was a spoilt child. He had fame, fortune, favour in unparalleled quantity, and the

moment arrived when he had so much that he could do nothing with it. Thus he became the Mark Antoine whom Captain Smyth had set ashore upon this island, and he had left his riches behind him. But those riches were his dope, and I saw that he would not, could not, do without his dope. It was nauseating now, but it would remain fatally attractive, for it was in his blood.

Ah-lee, transferring his attention to my left knee, diverted my thoughts.

"Ah-lee, what was it the native said at Palm Island when we wanted to take his picture?" I knew. The question was that of the solitary man who thinks aloud.

Ah-lee was crouching at my feet, his long yellow fingers busy. He is an excellent masseur. He is bald, and yellow and thin as a dried reed. His skin is harsh and autumnal like a dead leaf, and his eyes are stone-coloured and as non-committal and cold. He is dignified, imperturbable, solemn, unutterably old. He wears cheap, steel-rimmed glasses which sit awry on his nose, giving him a suggestion of carnival but as if they were a souvenir of some other and more boisterous spirit and were no real part of him. His eyes look out through them as a professor might look out of the windows of a gay house in which he was an unwitting visitor. His English is pedantic.

"Sir," he answered, "the native said: 'Suppose you take'm picture me might stop along little

bokkus!' Sir, it is a common belief among the primitive—the camera takes some part of them away in its box!"

He looked infinitely wise and condescending; he patronised the barbarians.

"How do you know they're not right?" I demanded.

"Sir, I do not know!" Ah-lee confessed, and went on with his labours.

I meditated on the text. At this moment my shadow was living in an uncountable number of places about the globe. In the rush of life I had never given a thought to the fact, but now it became surprisingly troublesome. Here was I in sanctuary, as much out of the world as the dead, yet I was still capering. I was making love, bestowing coveted kisses, dancing, fighting, smiling as only I—I am assured—can smile. My shadow self was still in the midst of it all. In the quiet of this room it seemed suddenly that all these ghosts which had stopped along in the little box were part of me. I felt as if these shadows demanded breath that they might live, drew upon me for life, sapped some vital and unknown energy from me. It was a preposterous idea. I spoke to the Chinese again to escape from it.

"The fact is I may be going up here!" I said, tapping my brow. "This is a risky experiment. It's the dope of the world, you know. I've lived on dope, and it may be bad, but it's kept me alive.

Now I've cut out dope, I'm sobering up, and it hurts!"

"Sir, yes!" Ah-lee agreed, showing me his graven face.

I did not know why, but he exasperated me.

"What do you know about it, you old idol?" I cried, half seriously. "You crouch down there saying 'yes' to everything and half the time you hear about as much as the floor!" He had fallen back on his calves and knelt before me, undisturbed and grave. He wore green pyjamas and sandals, and his glasses were awry. The reason for my irritation dawned on me. "You—! I was wrong to bring you here," I said, pointing an accusing finger at him, as if he were to blame. "You don't belong here. Why, even Jenkin—Jenkin himself, the prince of boosters—would be better here. He'd be planning dope, but you are dope. You're part of the circus; you're dope for the press, for the mob, for me! You're ugly—you're unusual—and so I have you with me as a contrast, to heighten my charms. It's a good point for the little boys with their pencils; they write it all down for the papers. The little girls read it, and think I'm a hell of a fellow. Get out, Ah-lee—leave me alone!"

I meant some of it; he did seem wrong in this room, with the sea and the palms chanting. The rest was acting, but I could not say how much of it. Ah-lee stood up, tucked his hands into his sleeves, and genuflected. He was the complete Chinese ser-

vant, a collector's piece, worthy of the estate of his master.

"Thank you, sir! Sir, good-night!"

He neither smiled nor scowled, but went away, hands still out of sight, heel-less sandals clip-clapping on the boards, eyes cast down. And then I knew what was wrong with him: he was so perfect that he was sham. Ah-lee was a symbol of all that was good and all that was bad in my life. He was an ideal attendant and his master was fortunate, but at the same time he was part of the great card-castle of show and pose, chosen for this purpose, fulfilling his mission completely. If, in sudden insanity, he had rebelled, put his fingers to his nose, cursed me, he would have stepped out of the carefully planned set of life, and then I—and then I would have dismissed him. That was alike the cruellest and most perplexing part of the position. I would have dismissed him; Mark Antoine wanted the perfect servant who was part of the card-castle.

With the departure of Ah-lee I should have been alone, but I was not, for Mark Antoine remained. He looked at me from the mirror of the deal dressing-table, and I looked back at him, so that our angry glances met and clashed. He was as annoyed by me as I was by him; he held me in as much contempt. But his wrath was no more than a mocking mimicry of mine, for all the vividness with which it was expressed. The flashing of his dark eyes, the curl of his lips, the frown upon his noble brow were

my own gifts to him, and he repaid me by making the flash, the curl, the frown a mere matter of play-acting. And he had done that for years in the mirror of the lens ; he was doing it now all over the world ; this phantom of me endowed me with a kind of shadow immortality, so that the assumed mood of a moment long forgotten went on and on, and even years afterwards had, in some strange way, to be sustained by me.

Fleeing from Mark Antoine I went to the window. He was not out there—out there, noisy darkness, space, the wheeling stars and the living sea. I stayed for a long time, and Mark Antoine and I lost each other in the illimitable distances of the night. Presently I returned to this room and began to write with the clear conviction which I expressed at the beginning, but as I wrote, and looking back over this, I do not know upon what I based my assumption that Maedchenbrueste was going to cure me. I do not know, indeed, that I want to be cured, or of what I could be cured. This notebook system is useful ; it compels one to reduce vague thought to words. But what I started out to express seems to have evaded me.

The trouble is that Mark Antoine is watching me from the mirror. He mocks me ; he turns me and my aspirations and my clumsy human seekings for the why and the wherefore into posings and silly, impudent deceptions. He says to me, through silent, bowed, much-kissed lips : " Consider me.

I am you. Look at me—the toy for virgins' desires, the shadow lover of unloved women, the ghost of passion and courage, the mime—I am you. How could you be thinking such things and meaning them? How can you honestly make such a claim? You are a film actor! You are a bit crazy. Your head has been turned. I am disgusted at your insolence!" He looks disgusted—magnificently so, and—good Lord!—he can only do so because I am looking in disgust at him.

This is a queer business, a strange birthday. Last year, I remember, I celebrated it by a party in Chicago. Only last year? Surely in another life! That *was* a party! I must call Ah-lee and have him take that mirror away. Perhaps Smyth's schooner will come in to-morrow.

4

I am trying to tell myself it does not matter—that at the worst she will only be here for a few days—but, somehow, it seems like a catastrophe. I should be able to laugh at the whole affair, but I cannot. I feel like the victim of a practical joke on Fate's part. Maedchenbrueste seems to have lost something, to have been violated.

This morning I was up at dawn, for we go to bed early here and the first hours of the day are the best. I put on my kimono and walked out on to the veranda. The light was young. The sky was silver-blue, flushing into scarlet in the East, the colour seeming to run out along some narrow bands of

cloud, spreading and growing. There was a freshness in the air, and the wind blew bravely. The waves foamed on the reef, and the sea ranged into the receding night, which ebbed away so that the horizon, save in the East, was still dim and grey. It was a happy hour. I surveyed my kingdom with pride, as if I had created it.

And down on the lagoon I found something which was no part of my kingdom—an astounding thing, the sight of which struck on my senses like a blow. A raft was on the lagoon, bobbing in towards the beach! My first thought was: how did that get there? I looked out at the sea, as if expecting to find some track, some record of the coming of this trespasser. But the sea, of course, was unchanged, empty. I had come to think of that sea as a barrier through which only Captain Smyth's schooner could find a way. A sense of disillusionment, of lost faith, awakened in me. I had flattered myself that I was dead, utterly freed from the world, and now the sea had failed me.

I have grown so into the way of living in my thoughts that the actual facts of the raft took second place to these considerations. But when I absorbed them, active dismay awakened. There were two passengers upon the raft, and they were women. Subconsciously I had expected shipwrecked mariners—clumsy, loud-voiced sailors with stubble beards and sunken cheeks—but there were women on that raft. It flashed upon me suddenly

that they would be women. What should Mark Antoine be doing providing a haven for men in peril of death? That was not his business. His business was to rescue damsels in distress. Two of them were down on the lagoon.

In some subtle way Maedchenbrueste suffered a change. The beauty which had been so real and unsullied became artificial and theatrical; the dawn was the work of a scene-painter; the surf and the palms and the sky were all part of a pretty picture, a fit setting for me, for Mark Antoine, for the handsomest man. There was black magic in the completeness and suddenness of this transformation. Peace fled. The roar of the wind in the palms, the thunder of the surf, took on a new note. I changed with my world, inevitably. This was a new scene; Mark Antoine stepped into it.

But I was bewildered, being utterly unprepared. I could make out the figures on the raft clearly now. One was in a silver frock with a scarlet shawl about her shoulders; the other was smaller and sombrely clad. For a time I could only gape, but then, recognising that something had to be done, I called Ah-lee, wrapped my kimono about me, and went down the steep path which led to the beach. The palms clattered above my head, applauding, shouting, and the rank grass rustled. Beneath that familiar roof of greenery the raft ceased to exist, and I almost believed I had been hoaxed by my imagination, and that the lagoon would be empty.

As I stepped out on to the beach I realised what had happened to the song of Maedchenbrueste ; it had changed to a note of mirth, mischievous mirth, malicious mirth. The surf which had been thunder was laughter ; the palms rocked with glee. But despite the taunting merriment, the raft was not a trick of the imagination. It was there, close in, a dozen yards from the shore. There should have been the shout of the director and the grinding crank for my entry. The unspoilt primitiveness had gone from my island ; the sun was a great Klieg lamp, the regular army of palms made a background, the beauty of sky and sea were cunningly devised for effect. I halted, and stared at the cause of all this, the intruders who debauched a virgin world into meretricious scenery—those women on the raft.

They were sitting side by side looking at me, and they were such types that at the first glance one knew them, comprehended all the details of their beings and clothing, did not discover strangers but met acquaintances again.

Upon that raft was an English girl and her maid. The mistress wore a silver evening gown and a Spanish shawl, with silver shoes and stockings. She was dressed for a ball, but the signs of the sea were on her—her clothing was stained with salt water, tattered. She was very English—tall and fair, long-limbed, long-fingered, clear of skin. Her hair was worn in plaits around her head. Her features were

fine as a cameo, her mouth small and firm, her eyes blue. She was beautiful, I suppose, in a cultured way—expensively beautiful. She gave an impression of being very skilfully wrought, a product of attention and care, the artificial and the natural each having their allotted part. Thus there was nothing incongruous in the fact that her wide blue eyes looked out from beneath brows which were not brows at all but delicate crayon-lines. She was the kind of girl who would arrive from a shipwreck with those brows in order. The small bag beside her would contain the wherewithal for her brows if it contained nothing else. One knew instinctively that she had been bored for a long time before the wreck, that her only code was to play the game, that she had been giving orders for generations, and that even in this amazing interlude she was quite confident of herself and life.

I did not notice her maid particularly : the mistress was quite enough for me. There she sat on that raft—the very ideal of a shipwrecked heroine from her hair to the sea-stained high heel of her shoe. We had never met before yet I knew her by heart. The knowledge had been thrust upon me in the past. And she was the last person in the whole human race I should have wished to find me on Maedchenbrueste. She was, also, the very person who would. A kind of sullen, helpless anger arose in me : a feeling that I was suffering from an injustice ; that Fate was making me a clown.

"Thank God," she said, as soon as I appeared, "we were afraid of savages. Where are we? Who are you?"

She had a clear voice, and spoke with assurance. She held her head a little on one side studying me as she would have studied a horse or a new servant.

"This is Maedchenbrueste Island," I answered. "I am Mark Antoine!"

The moment the words were spoken I regretted them. Perhaps she had not recognised me; I should have said I was William Brown. But seeing her there so calm and so at ease I was conquered by a desire to startle her, to impress her. I declared myself, and admit I did so with an air, proclaiming not only my identity, but that it was something to be Mark Antoine.

"Mark who?" she asked, leaning forward a little.

"Antoine!"

"Oh, Mr. Antoine!" Her voice conveyed that the name meant nothing to her, and I was relieved and yet piqued. Heaven knows I did not want her to know me, and yet I felt she should have.

"Mr. Antoine, we've been wrecked!" she went on, and she spoke bravely, lifting her chin, smiling at me. I saw that she demonstrated how unshaken she was, what spirit she had. I saw she was impressing me. The shawl fell back from her shoulders which were very bare and firm and white—shoulders to be admired. The raft had floated to within a yard of the shore. She prepared to step to the

beach. The maid had taken up her bag. I looked into her face and saw—without pleasure but with alarm—that even if my name was unknown I remained the handsome man, a thrilling rescuer. My first impressions were confirmed. Indeed, she had been bored for a long time before the wreck.

"I am Lady Moira Tremearne," she said. "This is my maid!"

I did not know what to answer. I did not want to say anything, but I have formed the habit of speaking my thoughts.

"My God," I remarked, blankly, "you are the kind of thing that would happen to me!" The words slipped out; they were spoken by my heart rather than my tongue, but they gained by that.

She drew her pencilled brows together, rebuked me, but at the same time could not conceal that she was pleased that I could speak so roughly, be the brute.

"You are very rude, Mr. Antoine," she said, coldly. "I do not understand——?"

She was fatal. I could do nothing right. I could not be myself with her eyes upon me; I could only be Mark Antoine. She was like all the women of the world crystallised in one body, and I acted for her, I was her creature.

"Oh, damn!" I cried, raising my clenched hands in deepest repugnance, but miming.

The raft had come ashore. She overlooked my remark, and extended her finger-tips to me, grace-

fully; I gave her my hand with a courtly gesture. It was all too unutterably false; it had nothing to do with Maedchenbrueste; it belonged to Los Angeles. She stepped ashore lightly, but a little wearily, with that same brave but restrained smile restored to her lips. Nothing could have been more perfect. She emerged from the shadow of death with well-bred control. I was behaving oddly, but she was not, and at the same time she was interested in my display. I am past blushing; there is nothing left for me to blush at; but in that moment I felt shamed. The maid followed her—a humble, drab young maid—and Ah-lee drew closer to render assistance. She took a grip on herself, was heroic without ostentation, was distantly arch because that was the thing to do.

"You are a recluse," she said, "and you don't like intruders. I can only apologise for dropping in on you, but it was no wish of mine. Perhaps you will put us up until we can get away?"

"Yes," I answered, helplessly, "oh, yes. The boat will be in at any time. Yes, come up to the house!"

I moved away from that hateful raft mechanically, and she walked by my side, explaining the manner of her coming. There had been a wreck—I heard through a mist of anger—the *Southern Cross* had been wrecked, an uncharted rock in the night. There was a ball on. If it was not an uncharted rock it was something equally disastrous. The ship

sank quickly. There had been panic, turmoil, torment, and out of it Lady Moira had emerged upon that raft with a keg of water and a tin of biscuits and her maid and her handbag. It was all rather awful, and she didn't want to talk about it. That, briefly, was her story. She told it without emphasis, omitting—obviously omitting—many harrowing details because she was far too perfect a guest to trouble her host with second-hand tragedy. She was not heartless, she mourned for those who had been her fellow-voyagers, but to inflict their griefs, or hers, upon me would have served no purpose.

I suppose I should have been grateful, well pleased that she was not hysterical or on the point of death, but I could be pleased with nothing about Lady Moira Tremearne. If she had been sick when she stepped ashore, if she had been old and ugly, if she had been crazy with relief, beside herself, I should have been less riled. But there she was, smooth and balanced, talking as if she had arrived to spend the week-end, and had experienced tyre trouble on the way down. It was wrong, maddening. She was the very essence of the slick civilisation from which I had escaped. As we climbed the path beneath the boisterous palms she seemed to have turned Maedchenbrueste into a botanical garden.

I answered her briefly, abstractedly, from as far away as possible. She forgave my behaviour, and paid me the tribute of thinking me unusual. She was much too polished to say so crudely, but I

gathered that she liked unusual men ; I gathered that she liked me. I loathed her.

It is now a little after six, the day has scarcely begun, and yet in a brief hour the whole scheme of my affairs has been ruthlessly deflected. While she remains on this island I might as well be staying at the Carlton. The surf is the rumble of traffic and the murmur of the crowd waiting for Mark Antoine to appear. I am Mark Antoine—the man in the mirror. No one else by any manner of means. I have not troubled to change my kimono. We make a bizarre pair—she and I—and we both appreciate these effects.

I am writing on the veranda, looking out across the sea. Ah-lee is laying breakfast for two. Lady Moira Tremearne is in her room, resting, recuperating after her journey. My man showed her to her room ; she has her maid with her. The Trade Wind is still blowing, the spray spouts from the reef, but where yesterday there was only Mark Antoine and I, to-day there is Society. Until Captain Smyth comes in, Maedchenbrueste will not be itself, nor I myself. There is no sail on the sea.

I suppose the situation is humorous, but I cannot enjoy it. The joke has too salt a tang for my liking, and I am the butt. I want to laugh, but I am cursing. I have been thinking so many things, and now all I can think is : what a type she is ! and, when will the schooner get here ? Damnation !

CHAPTER II

I

LADY MOIRA TREMEARNE was in no hurry for breakfast, and I had ample time for meditation. Pacing the veranda, I brooded upon my lot—and yet I could not help smiling. It was tiresome, but, also, absurd. I had buried myself in the sea, but the women were not content with my shadow, and, guided by Chance, had sought me out. And at that a sensation-craving society woman in a sleeveless, back-less gown! The trouble was that I was a sick man, ill in mind and soul—and the worse because I had just reached the state of discovering that I ailed. All my life I had been ill, but only on Maedchenbrueste had I had sufficient privacy to be aware of the fact. Now, while I was neither mercifully deadened nor cured, the privacy had gone leaving me worse off than ever—sensitive and defenceless, like a shell-fish torn from its home.

Anger only served further to irritate my nerves, but I could not check it.

The maid appeared. She wore one of those dresses of cheap black shiny stuff; her hair was short, her eyes were round. She was very young, confused and nervous, and the blushes flooded out from her high cheek bones. I turned on her as on

an enemy. She goggled at me, gaped at me, mouth open, worshipping, awed. In her I saw a thousand thousand gaping, goggling maids. They were my friends, part of the vast army who had made me, but I was sick of love, sick of success. I had no quarrel with them, I was duly grateful, but I had come here to escape for just a little while, and they would not let me. There that maid stood with her simple soul looking out of her eyes at the wonderful creature which was Mark Antoine. I should have been touched; in any other place I would have been flattered, but on Maedchenbrueste I detested her.

"Well——?" I demanded, for she stood there dumb.

It is part of my life not to conceal my feelings, to talk with my face. I suppose I told her a great deal.

"She's sorry—sorry to keep you! Be out in a moment!" The little fool's eyes were brimming. "Oh, Mr. Antoine——!" she gasped in her high Cockney voice, her lips piteous.

Her distress surprised me, and then I realised that I was striking a magnificent attitude, expressing my indignation in a way which would have sent a thrill through the heart of a host of simpletons in any darkened theatre. Before I could relent she had fled. She left me more angry with myself and with my visitors, because I felt ridiculous. I remembered the Mark Antoine I had seen so often, and

pictured him standing there registering awful wrath to annihilate—a little Cockney servant of eighteen or so. What a fool!

"Why this—to me?" I asked furiously, and the wind shouted, the palms applauded, and the surf muttered like the voice of the distant world.

Presently Lady Moira appeared in the doorway. She was radiant, collected, mistress of the situation, and she considered me, the veranda, the breakfast table and the universe with a pleased, appraising glance such as she might have bestowed upon a golf course which promised an enjoyable round. The evening gown looked daringly becoming in the brightness of the morning, leaving her much less clad than it would have at night, and by its stains and tatters quietly declaring that it was the costume of great adventure.

There was a small, apologetic smile on her lips.

"I'm sorry I've no more appropriate frock," she remarked lightly, "but that is one of the disadvantages of being wrecked!" I could not answer her, but considered her, I fear, as if she had been a distasteful exhibit in a museum. "I have one favour to ask of you, Mr. Antoine," she went on. "I have been—to put it frankly—through hell these last few days. I have blundered into something very like heaven." She complimented me with a little, patronising bow. "Don't let us talk any more about what is passed. It can serve no purpose. It is better to try and forget. Is that agreed?" She was so

brave, so quiet, so noble in her manner and her consideration.

"Yes!" I said, vaguely.

"I'm hungry! I'm thirsty!"

I suppose I should have thought of that—she had some claim in the name of hospitality—but she was not my guest; I do not entertain on Maedchenbrueste—people should not expect to be entertained by a sick man. I nodded, and drew up a chair for her. Her eyes thanked me. Her eyes are innocently blue, but fashionably bold—the kind of eyes which, looking over the cocktail glass, turn the casual remark into something with a merry meaning. I sat down, and there we were, *tête-à-tête* in the wilderness, in our private room, the walls of which were the sea. Never did a man have less relish in a position fraught with such possibilities. If there had been a flaw it might have been different—some obstacles, something lacking. But there was none of these things. The island, the woman and Mark Antoine were all just as they should have been—and in my mood that robbed the situation of all its spice and sickened me by its humour. The glamorous adventure so certainly spread was unthinkable. And yet I had to recognise that in her proper setting, and not considered seriously, Lady Moira could have been a fascinating companion. Her tricks are tricks but could be quite amusing; her beauty, though cultivated, is very pleasing—but not here—not here!

Ah-lee served the paw-paw, and as she took up her spoon she leant across the table impulsively.

"You must pardon me, Mr. Antoine, for being entertained by an angel unawares," she said, and I knew what was coming, and cursed myself for that fatuous declaration. "My maid has instructed me on the point—she is, of course, a keen follower of the 'pitchers.' The name was familiar, though I had not been able to place it, now——!"

She completed the sentence with a gesture which combined flattery and sarcasm. I sat stock still as if she had me covered with a revolver. I knew her kind—she would not do anything so common as going to the movies—but she knew me, she had known me all along. This was merely play-acting, and for my benefit. She was attacking the famous Mark Antoine from an angle which would surprise him—from the heights of superiority. My mind was busy with all this, and yet when I spoke it was as the result of another train of thought.

"Your maid——!" I burst out, but checked my tongue, for I was on the point of a denunciation of her maid and all other maids which would have amused and delighted her. I sat dumb, raging, while she went on. She ate her paw-paw daintily; her voice was modulated and affable, and her punctuation was so cunning that the rudeness of her words was veiled.

"She is a simple creature, but I like her. The ordinary lady's maid is far too clever for me. Ann

is a good girl. She finds you a most thrilling person. I shouldn't be surprised if even now she's not studying you from some vantage-point!"

I wanted to stop her, to tell her not to trouble, to warn her that this was waste of time; but she was clever. The thought of that little Cockney girl, Ann, following me about everywhere I went, goggling from out of every window and from round every palm, was disconcerting, so disconcerting that I lost the power of speech. Lady Moira did not; Lady Moira would always have something smoothly ironical to say, no matter what came upon her.

"You are remarkably fortunate, Mr. Antoine. All classes are your slaves. I have a little niece, Lady Betty O'Day"—this because I was American, and titles filled me with wonder—"whose room contains at least five photographs of you. I fancy you even signed one for her. She will be positively green with envy when I tell her I met you! I thought I knew your face the moment I saw it!"

She spoke with artistry which I cannot reproduce. She was not merely insulting, perhaps she was not insulting at all—all this was merely demonstrating that I could be at ease with her because she did not belong to the tiresomely fervent army of my admirers. But on Maedchenbrueste the objective was too plainly indicated. Elsewhere, perhaps! I had to stop her. One fool was enough.

"If you'll take my advice you'll drop it," I broke in, which was not what I intended to say at all.

"I don't understand——?" She lifted her brows—delicate as the stroke of a Chinese painter's brush—and grew distant.

But I was not going to put up with any more. I pushed my plate away—it was claimed by Ah-lee with dexterity—and faced her across the narrow table. She watched with interest.

"Look here, I'm going to be honest with you," I said, trying to speak reasonably, but hearing my voice tuned a shade higher than it should have been. "I'm going to tell you how I feel about things. It will save us both a lot of trouble—save us making bigger fools of ourselves than we are. I don't want to be inhospitable or anything like that, but I'm a sick man and I can't stand on ceremony. I feel bad about you coming here. This was a place I'd escaped to where you weren't—you and all your sisters—a place where for the first time in my life I was going to have the chance to be myself. I tell you I was breaking up, going to pieces, nerves in ribbons! I was sick of life—I'd had too much of it—and I wanted to get hungry again by going on a starvation diet. You can't understand, but——!"

Lady Moira raised one long white finger as a signal, as a command. I heeded, I obeyed.

"Oh, yes, I can understand," she said. "It's an obvious thing. Who are you? What are you? I know the kind of life you've had, and it's turned your head. You weren't fit for it. Emperors have been driven mad by flattery, and they were born

to it, prepared for it through generations. You've had more flattery than any Emperor, but you've not Imperial blood in your veins!"

She was very rude now, insolent, but I had given her the right to be. This did not make the truth more pleasant to hear from her.

"Imperial nothing!" I stormed. "I tell you I'd had all I wanted, and I'd got away. And now you've spoilt it! Nothing could have spoilt it more than you!"

"You flatter me!" she said.

"You know what I mean! I know you, though we've never met before. You're typical of what I'm running away from—you—your kind! I can see you, see the game you're playing. You're enjoying all this—you think this is a good line of caveman stuff of mine. You're hoping I'll be threatening to whip you soon!"

This was too candid. I regretted having gone so far, and stopped with a jerk. Lady Moira was as cool as I was hot, as calm as I was excited, as well-bred as I was ill-bred. She would have driven a saint mad.

"Really, I'm afraid your nerves have got the better of you," she answered very quietly, rebuking me and apologising for me in the same breath. "Please remember my visit is as much against my will as it is against yours. The sooner I can get away the happier I shall be. When can I do so?"

I was sobered and wanted to apologise for my childish display, but I could not, without acknowledging that she had beaten me at the game she played—for, despite her apparent seriousness, she was still playing a game. Mark Antoine betrayed all this, but I spoke now sanely enough.

"I do not know," I said. "Captain Smyth's schooner should be in here at any moment. She is overdue. He will take you to Samarai."

I was growing worried about Captain Smyth, beginning to fear that something might have happened to him. We did not look at each other for the moment, but at the sea. The rolling, empty expanse was disconcerting; it seemed no ship would ever come across that waste. The cursed raft drifted upon the lagoon with the outgoing tide. There was loneliness and sadness in the song of the wind. Lady Moira began to strum upon the table, quietly but nervously. Ah-lee served fish, and we ate in silence, without much appetite. I was struck by what strange things environment can do to human beings, and by what a strange environment this was. The sea seemed to wash one clear of the conventions, the wind seemed to blow away the polite masks of society. She and I, who should have been fencing and fooling in the way of our kind, had come to blows quickly with words like clubs, cutting unessentials. But the fact remained that we were in a grimly humorous position, and that there was a preposterous absurdity clouding every-

thing we said and did. The rougher I became, the more balanced she grew—the greater fools we were. I had no wish to speak again as long as she was on the island, but that was not Lady Moira's way.

"You greeted me with the news that I was the kind of thing that happened to you," she remarked, over her coffee-cup, conversationally. "The remark can be reversed. I'm rather surprised you don't know of me. I'm notorious. You pride yourself on your experience and your knowledge of women, obviously; I have had experience, I know a little about men—I've divorced two. The papers on my side of the Atlantic love me. I am the darling of the mob. They are shocked at my indiscretions, appalled at the fastness of these people who, in disturbed days, should be showing that they are worthy of their rank—and they are wildly envious. Don't you see how appropriate it is?—that you are the kind of thing that happens to me?—that if I had to be cast away on a desert island it should be with you?"

She was challenging, provocative, lightly brazen. I was goaded by the knowledge that the foolishness of my anger stripped it of all dignity. She had laid her finger upon the very sorest point.

"Yes, that's just the worst of it!" I admitted, ruefully.

"There is one thing: all this will serve your main purpose——"

"What?"

"Publicity—think of the publicity! Not only American and some English—but columns and columns of English publicity. I have made it perfect. It's strange, I always seem to be giving publicity to somebody!" She grimaced quaintly.

I was wounded. For all her boasted experience she saw in me only Mark Antoine and flung at me the accusation which is the film actor's unescapable portion. I sat scowling at her.

"Publicity! Yes, you and publicity—that's true!" By her coming she had made this island which had been a dream into that. She was the one thing for which Jenkin would have wished to make all complete. Nobody else would have served so well. As I looked at her a revelation came to me, sudden as lightning. She, like Ah-lee, was so perfect that she was sham. She was sham! I felt as if I looked at her for the first time. I discovered her—saw all her calmness, saw all her greedy appetite for sensation, saw what a bore life had become, saw what she would risk for a thrill—saw the whole damnable plot and reason for her presence there as clearly as if a new picture had flashed upon the screen of my mind. A child should have seen it; a blind man should not have been deceived by Lady Moira Tremearne.

"You——!" I said, speaking with difficulty, for rage had me by the throat, "you've not been wrecked—you came here somehow—because you knew I was here!"

"I beg your pardon?" she said, frigid, eyebrows drawn together, lips contemptuous.

"You heard me," I insisted. "You've not been wrecked—you couldn't have been! A wreck and being afloat on a raft doesn't leave a woman as you are. No—not much! This is all a stunt. This is too perfect to be the work of Chance: this is your work. You've chased me here, some cunning way, some well thought out way such as you would find—with your experience! And now you're lying to me! I know you—your sort! A lie!—living lies always! I should have seen it the moment I saw you! I was a fool!"

She heard me, endured me, let me finish. And then, while I sat crouched forward in wildest chagrin, she stood up, very tall and straight and well poised, and looked down at me as if I had been a snake—a worm.

"You are insulting," she announced. "I'm afraid your egomania is nearing insanity. *I* chased *you?* Really——!" She brushed the madman's suggestion away into the void. "I suppose such treatment as this is only what one might have expected. I'm here, I'm at your mercy, I am not one of your adoring ladies." She paused again. "I cannot leave your house until the ship comes in, but, if you've any shred of decency, you'll not speak to me again, and will arrange for me to have my meals alone with my maid!"

Infinite scorn was in her eyes; her bare shoulders

trembled, her hands were clenched. This was horrible—rank, flaring, glaring melodrama—a blatant situation—the hero and the heroine quarrelling dramatically, creatures of a poster. I could not stand it; I swear I felt as if something in my head was going to snap. I had been dreaming on Maedchenbrueste, looking for something I had lost or never had, and now she had made me into a thing of grease-paint.

I sprang to my feet, upsetting my chair.

"That's just what you would say——!" I raved. She did not heed me, she was walking towards the house, fleeing. She gathered her worn gown about her as if to avoid contamination. "And that's just what you would do! My God, you hideous, wooden marionette, couldn't you have found something new?—couldn't you have said something else——?"

She had gone. I was left alone on the sunny veranda in the presence of the eternal sea and sky, in the grip of the lusty Trades. The blood was drumming in my ears. But beneath the cauldron of my wrath, like a fire making it boil more strongly, was the clear, unquenchable light which showed me that the whole affair was trivial, farcical, and a marvellously sardonic jest.

I had to escape—to get away. I ran from my own house in my kimono and pyjamas, and the palms closed above me like the waters of the sea.

2

When Ah-lee brought my lunch to me down here on the beach he told me that after our scene this morning Lady Tremearne sent her maid to ask if there were any aspirin in the house. There wasn't, and I am glad there wasn't—childishly, stupidly glad—driven to take pleasure in the footling revenge that she has a headache. I despise myself, but what else can I do?

If she has a headache I have a score of aches—an ache in my pride, an ache in my brain, an ache in my heart, and an ache in my side such as is caused by too boisterous laughter. I have been wandering about my forlorn domain all day long like a child who has been punished for a crime of which he is not guilty, or, at any rate, for something which he is not convinced is a crime. There should be a manly, firm, courageous course to follow—but I cannot find it. Whatever action I contemplate upon second thoughts stands revealed as fraught with possibilities for further scenes, for further strutting, for further painful mirth. The one certain thing is that I must avoid meeting her again, and that will not be easy. I am not going to be turned out of my house, however—I draw the line at that.

The sun is in the western sky, going away, losing some of its heat. I am sitting propped against the bole of a palm on the edge of the grass with the

beach before me, and the lagoon and the sea. The palms are bending and nodding ; through the smoke of the reef I can watch the waves marching round the world ; on the shore an endless struggle for life goes on between the vermin which dwell there ; the sky above is an infinity of blue—everything is the same—the same as it was when I sat here yesterday —but the effect on me is totally different. I loved all this yesterday ; to-day it fills me with sorrow, and a sense of futility.

Three things stand out in my memory of this morning's melodrama. The point she made about lacking the Imperial blood to fit me for the Imperial triumph ; the suggestion that I am going mad, and the disturbing fact that I do not know whether she came here or was brought by the sea. From these things arise many perplexities. She is right about the blood, it is what I have felt myself, but she has made the knowledge more certain. I dare not think about the madness. I have been feeling strange, I have had many fancies foreign to me of late, but I swear I am not mad. It was the cruellest, most vile blow she could have dealt ; not a fair blow. I have recognised I am a mass of nerves, have been frightened of myself, but now she has set this ghastly, horrible threat to stalk me, and the harder I try to run from it the more likely am I to be caught. It is fiendish.

And as for her—I know not what to write. If she is as she claims to be, if she has come through

the horror of shipwreck with her courage so high—then she is the finest woman she could be with her temperament and her life to contend against, while I am the poorest kind of thing. On the other hand, if she has come by some trick, is lying, came here to make me into a toy for her neurotic cravings—then I am the victim and nothing could be too bad for her. For one, her word and the circumstances ; for the other, suspicion and a knowledge of the type, a conviction that Fate could not send Lady Tremearne to me, that the trick is too artful. And in between, Mark Antoine—more Mark Antoine than me now—holding the judgment scales, at a loss, unable to decide which way they swing.

I give it up. I am thirty-one and somewhat experienced, but this problem puzzles me completely. It would serve no purpose to enter here all the theories which arise in me. I can only await the outcome. If the masts of that schooner would show over the rim of the world I should be the happiest man alive.

I am going to swim now. The water will be clear and cool and green ; I have been looking forward to it all day like a child, keeping it as a treat—and I am Mark Antoine, thirty-one years of age and quite a person !

3

I awakened with a start, warned of something happening. The room was dark, and the only sounds were those which should not have disturbed

one who dwelt on Maedchenbrueste, for they were woven inseparably into the pattern of life. For a second I could not imagine what the matter was, but lay still, peering about, and then I discovered that, although the open window was still an oblong of velvet and stars, along one edge of it there was a mist of light, which, as I looked, disappeared, only to flash back again after a brief interval. This phenomenon was startling and eerie, because it was unprecedented. The night of Maedchenbrueste had always been as dark, complete and unchanging as death.

Rising, I tiptoed across the room and looked out. The world was wrapped in gloom, and the palms were dim masses of restless shadow. But as I looked a bright patch of light appeared upon them, close to the house, revealing their tossing, troubled fronds in a bright mist. I gaped at it, and, newly aroused from sleep, was completely puzzled. It vanished, shone again. Some one was signalling!—the explanation surprised me as much as the light had done. Who signalled on Maedchenbrueste, and to whom did they signal out in the depths of night?

I was indignant. This was my kingdom, but events were going on in it from which I was excluded. The light shone from Lady Moira's room, and all my doubts and suspicions were aroused again. How dared she do this? What kind of a fool was that woman making of me? Mystery was added to all the other peace-destroying gifts she had brought.

The sea did not answer her. The stars burned brightly, but no light showed. I was pleased, and smiled, restored, though without reason, to my friendship with the ocean. There was malicious and illogical satisfaction in the thought that Lady Moira wished to see a light out there, but it was denied to her.

The experiences of the day had made me wary, but, obviously, this had to be investigated. I put on my slippers, and stole from my own house like a criminal. The wind blew more strongly and the waves roared with a deeper note. The palms thrashed and swayed. My pulses quickened. Even the stars had drawn closer. I was a dwarfed shadow moving cautiously through tumult and excitement.

The house, which is built high in the fashion of tropical dwellings, rose dim and white above me. It was no longer my home ; I felt the chill loneliness of an outcast. Rounding the corner, I halted, unseen, out in the wind and the dark. Threads of light revealed the window, but, suddenly, it was a warm, golden square, like a small stage on which the curtain had risen. The effect was queerly beautiful. Lady Moira had drawn the blind, and stood looking into the darkness, her maid by her side. They had the light behind them, so that their faces were not clearly visible, but I knew they watched for an answer with keen anxiety, and that the ocean told them no more now than when I had been able to see it.

Their attitudes were strained; they leaned forward, they peered, they were tragic figures: the waiting women, the disappointed ones. There was just that one bright square in the frame of the dead house and the wide sky, and in it—fantastically incongruous—Lady Moira, wearing pink silk pyjamas, and the maid in a kind of cotton slip. They faced each other abruptly, stiffly, the mistress moved her head very slightly, telling the girl what she already knew, and then drew down the blind again. The curtain had fallen.

The thing was dramatic, beautiful, pitiful—I cannot explain why, but that was how it struck me. This was just what I had expected to see; its meaning angered me, and yet it had a peculiar emotional appeal, like a primitive painting. I felt guilty, as if I had looked upon some simple act, terribly revealing, and not for my eyes. But I remained aware of the other side to this matter; that I saw the hateful society woman playing a trick upon me—and my wrath persisted.

I stood there, and the curtain rose again. The maid wiped her eyes, with the knuckle of her right hand, clumsily. I saw Lady Moira in profile for a breath, and her face was set and grave. They searched the sea, but found nothing. The curtain fell again. The wind clamoured. I wondered how long they had been staging this drama in one act repeated over and over again. I knew it had to be stopped; that it, like everything else on Maedchen-

brueste, was ridiculous. When next the performance began I stepped forward.

"What are you doing there?" I demanded, like a policeman, but suddenly feeling comical out in the tremendous night clad as I was, peering up at those two.

"Oh!" said Lady Moira, sharply, and she put her hands to her throat, and looked down at me in surprise and chagrin. The maid turned rigid, goggled.

"Whom are you signalling to?"

The first shock of my voice passed off, and Lady Moira became herself again, lost the beauty she had had, reverted to the clever woman who was equal to any situation. But before the transition was completed she said, "God knows——!" in an unsteady voice, and that was real enough.

Then she was leaning against the side of the window; she shrugged, her brows frowned and her lips smiled. Ann faded out of the affairs of her betters.

"What does this mean?"

She was above me, in the light, at her ease now; I was down there, a spy, a dweller in the outer darkness. Our circumstances added nothing to my peace of mind.

"I should have thought it was obvious enough, Mr. Antoine," she said coolly. "We're not such welcome guests that we wish to prolong our stay. There are ships that pass in the night, Mr. Antoine,

and it is worth trying—anything is worth trying which means that we are going to get away from this hateful place. Yes, we were signalling, Mr. Antoine, but without success!"

Her voice sounded strangely through the confusion of Nature, so calm and fine, so apart from all the other sounds. One thing, at least, in what she said was true.

"You hate this place, then?" I asked awkwardly.

"Hate it, yes," she said. "You've been here longer than I have; surely you know how hateful it is?"

By a trick of the light I saw her eyes. There was much trouble in them.

"It wasn't hateful until you came!" I protested.

"Perhaps you didn't notice it, but it must have been," she said. "Just think for a minute, Mr. Antoine—isn't everything that happens here a joke—a nasty practical joke at which you want to cry but feel you should laugh, at which you want to laugh but feel you should cry? Isn't everything so funny, so maddening? And doesn't every joke, just as you see it, turn against yourself? I thought it was a joke me coming to your island—and now I'm part of the joke—I'm being mocked! It's an uncanny, horrible joke, and I could cry over it!"

I was silent. The fact that she had experienced sensations so similar to my own was remarkable, but it did not make a bond of sympathy between us. She could say what she liked, but she was responsible

for the bitter humour, and, I still suspected, deliberately responsible. Before I could find an answer she spoke again.

" Let me demonstrate to you," she said, and for the first time I noticed that her long hair fell about her shoulders, streaming in the wind. I waited, uneasily wondering what she meant. She leaned down towards me, held out her arms, and cried : " O, Romeo, Romeo ! wherefore art thou Romeo ? "

That was all. She burst into laughter which had no mirth, and the blind came down with a snap. But the demonstration lacked nothing. I was abandoned in the darkness, grinning foolishly at the thought of us, two pampered darlings of the world, out in that wild, empty night, beneath the stars, with the orchestra of the Trades and the surf, buffoons in silk pyjamas but prisoners of the sea.

I had left my room in indignation and certainty ; I returned to it with nothing achieved save another unhappy situation.

I did not want to sleep, so I have recorded all this, but having done so I am none the wiser. I feel that she did not come here honestly, and merely repents a folly, but I may be doing her an injustice. One thing, however, is painfully clear : as long as this continues I shall know she is appreciating to the full what a fool I have been made.

CHAPTER III

I

I DO not know how long she has been here now. Although it cannot be much more than a month it seems an indefinite period stretching back and back. This strange life of sulking and dodging, decision to do something and failure to do anything, has become a habit. The real world has simply ceased. It is not there any more. She and I have always been and shall always be inhabitants of this dot of earth. To-day I must establish a more reasonable basis, but it is going to be difficult, because we both fear to depart from our passive hostility in case we become involved in further foolishness.

She is entirely to blame for our lot, but neither of us is to blame for failing to cope with it. This place is so odd ; it is so much easier to do nothing ; the days drift by, full of wind and sun and the sound of the sea, each so like the one that has gone before that it seems to be all the same day. The nights are all one. The grey, thin light of what should be a new day fills the room as I write, but I know that when I go out the wave will still be curling to the reef, the palms bowing in the wind, the sea running into the cloudless sky. It will be

idle to insist that the wave is not the same, that the wind comes fresh across the ocean and hurries on, that the processional rollers go their way—for ear and eye can detect no difference and will not be convinced, while the mind is bewildered by the unvarying repetition.

To-day, whether I like it or not, I must grapple with the problem. That man Smyth has disappeared as completely as the world with which he was my link, and we cannot go.

2

Lady Moira's laughter interrupted me. It was an alarming sound, for this has been a quiet household, hushed as if we were all ashamed of ourselves. She talked to Ann, I talked to Ah-lee, and for the rest our only desire was to be left alone. But there was Lady Moira laughing out on the veranda, laughing wildly, hysterically, laughing in a way to make one shiver.

I ran out of the room and down the passage. I could see her on the veranda. She was holding the rail with her left hand, and stood crookedly in what is left of her gown, weak with mirth though tears were on her cheeks. An hilarious fiend seemed to have taken possession of her to her horror. I heard Ann running and Ah-lee upon her heels. All our little, lost community was flung into panic by that painful merriment.

"What is it?" I asked.

She looked at me as if she could not see me.

"Look—oh, look!" she answered, and waved helplessly down at the lagoon.

I ran to the rail expecting—expecting—I do not know what I expected, but not *that!*

Another raft had come in. It was down there on the flushing water beneath the flushing sky; it bobbed towards the shore. Upon this raft there was a girl, who lay face downwards, her head pillowed on her outflung arm. Even at that distance she made a tragic picture; she was a victim of the sea, weak and broken. The raft had the usual fittings.

My first thought was: this is monstrous! I would have laughed as Lady Moira laughed; I would have wept as she wept—but I could not move, my muscles were paralysed with amazement and rage. A raft—another raft!—another heroine! No wonder she laughed and wept. We had been great people once, proud people; we had become fools, we became greater fools. That raft down there was too ironical, was monstrous! This was against law and decency and everything else! This would have to be stopped.

What——? What would have to be stopped? The answer sprang into my mind from nowhere. Captain Smyth would have to be stopped. He had fooled me, sold me; he was picking his women—silly, idle, touring women looking for excitement—and they were paying him to bring them here. He

was tricking them as he tricked me. I was a gold mine to him, and he would work me for all I was worth. Heaven only knew where he would stop. He could bury me in women and I should be powerless. Each of his victims would be blissfully innocent; each would believe she was to be the only one with Mark Antoine on his beautiful island, and the thing could go on and on. There was no redress; they came of their own free-will, and he broke no law in bringing them. I saw his scheme and its results with indescribable clearness in a single flash. A hundred trivial details were filled in; I knew what was in Captain Smyth's mind as well as if he had told me. The possibilities stretched before me in a ghastly vista.

Was ever a man caught in a more wretched trap? Oh, what a clown I have been made!—in what a torturing farce has he involved me. I cannot bear to dwell upon it, to write the things I foresee, to look ahead into the shameful mockery which is wrapping about me. I came here for peace, to escape! I wanted nothing more from the world; I call the pages of these books to witness that I was grateful for my fortune, but felt that my own weakness unfitted me to enjoy any more success until I had some quietness in which to recover. Surely, there was little harm in a dazed man stepping aside from life for just a month or so? But, no! I was a fool—I am Mark Antoine, the film star, and I have no right to meddle with such things. I should have

been content to be the shadow-man who was greater than any of flesh and blood.

And even as I write this from the bitterness of my heart I have to smile—I want to guffaw—at the picture of the mighty Mark Antoine who tried to run away from the dear ladies who had made him, but for whom an insignificant creature named Smyth, powerful as a god, has other plans. Oh, hell!

3

The sweat was running down my face, the raft bobbed in towards the beach, and at my side stood Lady Moira. Emerging from my trance I discovered her, and she was the very essence of all I dreaded and abhorred. To the injury she did me by coming here she had added the insult of lying, had wronged me, had made me a prey to unhappy disquiet by her assumption of outraged innocence, and had fooled me.

My face spoke for me, but she met my glance with blue eyes hardened by the perversity of Captain Smyth. She, too, had learnt that she had been duped, and she was too desperate to care about anything. In complete defeat she regained her self-control. She looked less dressed than ever, quizzed us both with a smile, admitted collapse and surrender with a gesture. Her expression was whimsical and yet serious, confessing all, accepting the consequences, making no plea for mercy.

"I should not have lied," she said. "I have my

faults, but lying is not a habit of mine. The position was difficult. It hurts being found out!" She grimaced.

It was the best course open to her, but she did it too well.

"You'll drive me to murder!" I burst out. There were a hundred destroying truths I might have poured upon her head, none came—only this banal threat.

"Mr. Antoine——!" she said, not so much in rebuke as passing off a silly remark.

I could not speak, but diverted my attention. Ann stood behind her like a ghost in the morning light; Ah-lee awaited my wishes, and there was the raft. I looked at Lady Moira again. The red of shame was in her cheeks. But I fled away, down the steps and down the path beneath the palms to the beach. The mission was an echo of that other morning, and more painful to the senses. The setting was exactly the same, but that was to be expected since Maedchenbrueste is eternity. The big crab which scuttled for its hole, the nut which fell with a thud, the broken frond which sawed upon its fellow—all these things had been happening long ago when Lady Moira came; they would be happening when the hundredth lady landed.

Stepping out from among the stems I saw the latest addition to the comedy at close range. She lay as we had seen her first, lifeless, a figure to appea to the protective instinct of any man—but not to

the clown who knew that this was only another slap.

We stood in a row regarding her.

"American!" Lady Moira whispered.

I nodded. The word failed to change my mood—egotism, sense of grievance, dismay and the fact that I was a citizen of Maedchenbrueste were too strong. Nationality could not prevail against these things. She was as bad as the Englishwoman; I had no more sympathy for her. There could be no doubt that Lady Moira had placed her correctly. The girl on the raft was neat, rounded, compact, soft yet firm. Her feet were very small, and she wore white buckskin shoes with bands of blue upon them to match the blue edging of her white jumper costume. There was a disciplined unruliness about her short, brown curls. Her face was hidden by a smooth arm, but it would be oval, olive, with a retroussé nose, high cheek bones, brown eyes holding light and shade, and red, full lips. I knew her.

Lady Moira knew her, also. She was not pleased. I saw her frowning, and there was hostility in her eyes. She would have no welcome for this intruder. Comical, of course—but that was inevitable. We were all comical; I was, in my gay kimono among my people, awaiting the moment when the latest admirer elected to discover that she was a jest. We stood in silence, watching with savage, appreciative humour. The raft was within twenty yards of the shore, and we could see the dimple on the girl's

elbow. She did not move, but kept up her useless lie, blissfully unconscious of the disillusionment to which the tide bore her. It was pitiful, but, after all, it was only part of a joke, and was no worse than the kind of things which had happened to us.

The palms and the sea were jubilant.

"What a fool she is!"

Lady Moira's delighted aside awakened me. Yes, she was a fool, but I could bear no more of this. I ran to the water's edge, anxious to be done with it. I held out my hands to that girl. "For God's sake get up! Don't make a fool of yourself! Get up, I tell you!" My voice was harsh and earnest, for I warned her against the fate of those who came to Maedchenbrueste, and implored her to abandon her folly. This greeting must have surprised her, but she was stubborn. The round arm did not quiver, the small feet did not stir.

Lady Moira giggled, like a schoolgirl.

I waded out knee-deep.

"Get up!—don't lie there like that!—" I wanted to tell her that we knew, but the words would not come. The actual fact of her pose obsessed me. And while I struggled against this a coral spike caught my foot, and only with difficulty did I save myself from being flung headlong into the water—in my kimono. The accident convinced me, suddenly, of the utter futility of attempting to intervene. Another fool insisted on adding herself to our band. I would let her; I could not stop

her ; she could carry it through to the final point of humiliation ; she could suffer as we suffered. I stepped back to the beach, abandoning her to her fate with a gesture. Lady Moira smiled happily. She met my eyes strangely. New interest lit her face. For the first time she seemed to weigh me, to judge me. I knew why—the circumstances had altered—there was no escape now and a rival had appeared. But I was not flattered by her glance. My bitterness intensified. I was more than the handsomest man : I was the only man.

The slow waters of the lagoon sustained the jest. I thought Lady Moira was going to scream. The moments dragged by. And just when the strain became intolerable, I was able to reach the raft and drag it to the beach.

" Get up ! " I ordered, standing over her, fists clenched.

The girl gave a little sigh and turned wearily on her side. I saw the face I had expected down to the smallest detail. It could not have fulfilled anticipations more completely. Her brown eyes looked up at me through half-closed lids and heavy lashes.

" My !—what ?—where ? " she said, vaguely, in a musical, husky voice. She went through the actions of mustering her senses. I let her do so. If she had not been so damnably right I might have relented. " Why, I fainted ! " she said. I suppose she thought pity and astonishment held me tongue-

tied. She saw nothing save Mark Antoine, the handsomest man. There could have been a hundred people at my shoulder and she would not have noticed them. "What is this place? Where am I?"

"This is Maedchenbrueste Island!" I told her, with a wealth of significance which was lost on her as yet.

"Now I'm getting it," she breathed. "Coming in through the reef—seeing the house—I'd kind of held up till then, but I let go at that! It's been—tough!" Her eyes were eloquent. I swear she said I was a great big strong man and she knew herself to be so safe with me. She told me, with her eyes, that she had crept into my protective arms and clung to me, a frail, helpless maid not made for stress but for the loving care of her man. It was disgusting.

"Yes—tough!" I agreed from the bottom of my heart. "You've been shipwrecked?"

She drooped.

"Why, yes!"

Lady Moira chose her moment well. She came forward now—a very lovely sun-tanned woman in the remains of a ball dress. She was smiling, affectionately and joyously, and she moved with quick, eager steps. The result was dramatic, though it consisted of no more than a shadow passing swiftly across the face of the new-comer and lingering in her eyes. Lady Moira knelt on the raft and snatched her hands.

"Oh, it's the little American! It's——?" She searched her mind for the name. "Oh, I'm so glad——!" she cried.

That woman could act. I had an impulse to stop her, but resisted it. Let them punish each other—set the trespasser to catch the trespasser. They were cruel to me by hunting me; nothing could be more cruel than to leave them as they came to the tender mercies of their sisters who had already been made into fools. It seemed to be the only revenge I could take.

"You'll be from the same ship!" I exclaimed, and having helped that much, stepped back and left them to it.

"Of course," Lady Moira agreed. "Has anybody else been saved from the *Southern Cross?* It's all a jumble to me. What happened? And what *is* your name again?"

It was, I confess, like watching gladiators who fought to the death with cooings and bright glances, but what sport could be more appropriate for Mark Antoine? A pause ensued, brief but burdened with significance. The brown eyes held very real bewilderment now. She did not know what was happening. But we knew—Maedchenbrueste had got her. The net closed about her. The joke which had been on us was on her now as well. We passed it on, and eased our own wounded pride. She hesitated, alarmed, looking up at Lady Moira. But there was no hope for her. Upon her mobile face

we saw decision take shape—a reckless resolve to rely upon this cue.

"Yes, that's so—I'm remembering. It's coming back. The *Southern Cross*, yes! It's all a blur like a dream. But I'm getting on to it. I'm—I'm Anita Shaw of Pittsburg. On the *Southern Cross*—yes!"

She implored Lady Moira to prompt her, and Lady Moira hastened to do so.

"I'm Moira Tremearne—you remember, Miss Shaw—Lady Moira Tremearne. Why, now I think of it, we were playing bridge together on the very afternoon before it happened! Don't you remember? You didn't change—you were off colour. It was rough—I fancy you were a trifle sea-sick!"

The little thrust went home with the desired effect.

"I wasn't sick," said Anita Shaw, betrayed into emphasising the absurdity. "I just couldn't be bothered—for that crowd! But I get it all now. Yes, you're Lady Tremearne. I remember you—I was always crazy about that frock, though most people thought it didn't suit you!"

"I'm crazy about it still!" Lady Moira admitted, playing to me, admitting that she, too, was a fool.

The brown eyes were growing brighter with every moment now. She was wildly relieved to find she was scraping through a difficult position in some miraculous, uncomprehended fashion. Her con-

fidence was growing with the day. But I did not care. I wished them both dead. This island was going to be a hell without doors populated by beautiful, charming, fashionable feminine devils—none others would wish to come or have the means to pay the admittance.

Anita Shaw rose to her feet somewhat stiffly, and stepped ashore. Lady Moira helped her. She looked about, taking in the scene. I was part of it —the important part of it. She forgot everything save the main objective. Recognition dawned upon her face. She gave a little cry of joy, ran forward with outstretched hand, prettily, girlishly, her expression radiant.

"Isn't it Mr. Antoine? Do you know I just couldn't see you until this moment? I've been stupefied. What are you of all people doing here? I'm not delirious, am I? You won't remember me, but I met you last Fall at the Burston's place. Marian du Lois introduced——"

She had planned this speech, but the flood of words broke off. She discovered she was standing there with her hand extended, while I, arms folded, regarded her with contempt. The attitude was unavoidable—nobody could have been natural on that beach, least of all Mark Antoine. She had been buoyed up by the hope that things would work out as she wished, she had succeeded in forgetting the unwelcome and alarming presence of Lady Moira, but now her confidence deserted her, and

panic took its place. She could not understand; flurried, her mouth opened.

"I can't figure what I'm doing here," I said. "Running an asylum for women!" I was registering anger.

She darted glances from me to Lady Moira who stood enjoying the comedy. The fear of the inexplicable swept up in her.

"Here, what's wrong with you all?" she gasped, anxiously. "What's the matter with this place?" She looked at the palms and out at the sea, at the unmovable Ah-lee and the wide-eyed Ann, and we were all silent for a moment, but the wind's shout did not cease.

"What's wrong?" said Lady Moira. "Everything!" The tone in which she spoke was rich from our experiences.

Anita Shaw seemed to crouch like a terrified hare. We knew that feeling. There was nowhere to which she could run.

"What is it?—what's wrong?" she insisted, urgently.

We wanted to laugh.

"Listen," I began, dropping into easy speech in an effort to reduce the moment to what it was. "You've been fooled, and all this time you've been making a greater fool of yourself. Everybody's made a fool that comes near this cursed place. She was fooled!" I pointed to Lady Moira, who nodded. "She came from the same ship you came from—

and with the same lie. She didn't come from the *Southern Cross*—neither did you. You came here on Captain Jacob Smyth's schooner chasing me—same as she did! And now she's seen to it that you've been made as big a fool as the rest of us!"

"Oh——!" ejaculated Anita Shaw, her lips rounded to the sound. She dug her toe into the beach, and looked at it, her curls falling forward. So she stood for a moment, absorbing the thing which had happened to her. Her fingers opened and closed. And suddenly she lifted her head, flung back her hair and, avoiding my eyes, glared at Lady Moira.

"You——!" she said in a choking voice. "You'd let me go on like that on the raft, you'd trip me into telling all those lies! You're downright sweet! I just love you!"

It almost seemed she would spring at Lady Moira, and the scorn in her voice was beyond description. Lady Moira, in her way, met this attack with serene effrontery, protesting very slightly with her shoulders and her brows, affirming her carelessness of what anybody thought.

"It was mean—catty!" she answered. "You hate me now, but you'll get over that. When you begin to learn what it's like to be ridiculous no matter what you do, you'll be so busy trying to stop crying that you'll only want to laugh at me." She drew her thin brows together and brooded for a second. "But you won't be able to laugh at me

without nearly crying. I could not laugh at you on that raft—not properly—in case I cried. If you were a joke you were the joke I had been. Wait a while—you wait and see how affectionate you feel towards the next of us. You were as bad as I—why should you be spared any of it because I had been through it? Only the more reason why you shouldn't! You wait and see. This place's bewitched. Everything's funny that happens here, and everything hurts. You're not sorry for the man who slips on the banana skin, but it's not much fun for him. We live in the shadow of funny woe—and it hurts—it hurts in a way that doesn't make one nice and kind and thoughtful! I've been the subject of love, scandal, envy and everything else, and I've survived them all. But I can't stand being something at which even I have to laugh! You wait!"

The emotion with which she spoke silenced Anita Shaw and held her spellbound. She could only stare, and believe, though she did not fully understand. The light went out of her eyes. She was initiated as one of us. I did not interfere. Lady Moira was speaking the truth now, and she said the very things I should have said. We stood silent for a time, considering each other, ourselves and our world.

"Gosh——!" cried Anita Shaw suddenly, and sat down as if her legs had lost their strength. It was as adequate as any other comment. She sur-

veyed us and then the horizon. Hope was restored to her face. She considered a comforting secret. I wondered what she had remembered.

Lady Moira spoke, unhappily.

"Well, I can save you, from that at least," she said. "I'll spare you that foolishness. Smyth told you he'd come in close every night, and you only had to show a flashing light from the house and he'd pick you up. Save yourself the trouble. He won't come—I've tried it. One day here was long enough to set me signalling for hours. He's not there. He's gone back to Samarai to get another of us. He's had your money, and that's all he cares about!"

I remembered Lady Moira's face that night, and I looked at Anita Shaw's now. The advantage it possessed in me did not seem to make up for Maedchenbrueste's drawbacks.

"I suppose," she said, breathlessly, "that this would sum up as a joke to beat everything!" She had become acquainted with the joke into which she had thrust herself—our joke. She laughed at it, she had to laugh—but her laughter was of the kind which is native to Maedchenbrueste: there was a sob in it. We joined her, out on that white, windy beach in the glare of the sun.

"If I could get my fingers on that little, no-account jelly-bean, Jacob Smyth——!" she panted, laughing no more.

Mirth restored anger.

"You're very sorry for yourself," I said, "but what about me?—haven't I got anything to say about all this?—haven't I a right to know what you mean coming here?"

Anita Shaw looked at me, remembered Lady Moira, remembered what she had been thinking on the voyage from Samarai, accepted the situation and made the most of it. She took up the part which she could play effectively and which would be the greatest contrast to Lady Moira. She became sunny, grew ingenuously bold. In that harsh sunlight it was all so obvious.

"Why, yes," she said, pouting. "Surely!—I came here for just the same reason she did!" With pretty malice she indicated the other. "I came here because you were here! I figured out it would be real romance—a first-grade thrill. Mark Antoine on an island like heaven, and the chance to be there with him and safe as could be. Tell me if you can beat it for romance—tell me! You don't seem pleased about it, and that's a shame. Why, you should be delighted with the compliment. And, anyway, it's your own fault. You shouldn't be Mark Antoine! You shouldn't have made us all crazy about you! You ought to think you're lucky!"

She crinkled up her nose at me in bewitching defiance.

"You wait and see——!" I warned her, echoing Lady Moira's threat.

"That's just what I've got to do!" she said. "That old Smyth—he's cute. He's caught me beautifully. If only my Aunt Letty knew I was here it wouldn't be many hours before she was along. But that old Smyth fixed Aunt Letty. Not a soul knows I'm here. She thinks I've gone down South to Sydney on the steamer because a girl we travelled with is mighty sick there. Say, if Aunt Letty knew—— But, there! she doesn't. Old Smyth fixed that. He'd only bring me here if it was a secret from everybody. Made it more romantic, too!"

Somehow it had not occurred to me that any of these people had friends and a life away from Maedchenbrueste. I had come to accept the fact that this was a place apart from the rest of the globe. I had been right; it was. Aunt Letty was out there somewhere in the world, but it made no difference. Captain Smyth had seen to that.

"You, too—I suppose nobody knows you're here except him?" I asked Lady Moira.

"Really, Mr. Antoine, you must remember I have some reputation to consider!" She smiled—but only her lips smiled.

They exchanged glances, jibing at me.

"What happens here?" asked Anita Shaw, meaningly.

"You manicure your nails and watch the sea; he fishes!" said Lady Moira, acting, yawning.

They were establishing some strange alliance,

which had no basis of friendship but was directed against me. They hated each other, they were jealous, I was the prize—but they were, at least, of the same tribe. I was not. They drew spirit from each other, and though competitors and foes were united by the ties of sex. They conversed with their eyes. Their eyes might have told me many things, but not those which they exchanged between themselves. Not all their hate could alter this. They came to some mysterious understanding, and each was more at ease, more confident of her part and more anxious to excel in it that the other might be discomfited. It was all completely illogical, of course, and all happened in a moment. They returned to the spoken word and the change was manifest.

Anita Shaw looked at me roguishly.

"It's quite exciting, all the same," she said. "You look swell when you're angry, Mr. Antoine!" Her eyes appraised me, and the impudent compliment might have provoked amused interest—elsewhere. She had made a success before with this attitude—elsewhere.

"It's about the only way you'll see our host!" Lady Moira commented.

Their voices, their airs of superiority over this silly male thing were unbearable. They treated me as Mark Antoine, their favourite. Lady Moira knew what I thought of her and that her little artifices were wasted. The stranger had to be instructed.

"I know you——!" I said to Anita Shaw.

She was very cheerful now.

"Of course—at the Burston's place last Fall!"

"Forget it," I said. "Not like that—you were one of the million. I only know you because you are the kind one gets everywhere. Your Pa's rich and simply worships his Anita. He's given her everything she's ever wanted, and she's wanted a few things in her time, but that's been all right—he had the dollars. Oh, you can dance, you don't mind petting, you're always doing what the crowd are doing and perhaps a bit ahead of them, you know what's in the brandest new cocktail and you've met everybody—like you met me. Your crowd are a live lot of boys and girls, who are all just as spoilt as you. Being so talented you're naturally inclined to be temperamental and difficult, but you are really a good girl at heart. You're wise to everything—from what your complex is to the latest precious poet—but generally you've got it all mussed up. You know that if you'd had the chance you'd have been a great singer—or a great something. You've never got it out, but it's in you just the same, and you take care to let the world know! You've a Soul—you hate the aimless life of the set Fate's forced you into. Oh, I know you, Miss Anita Shaw! And you would come here! You and her and that maid—you would come here. And you just make it right—you fix it!"

During this tirade they both listened and watched

me attentively, and that swept me on. I was acting for them, thrilling them, and they were far too appreciative to interrupt. I was aware of this, but had to say it all, give them the whole show. However, I hoped some of it would sink in later, and in any case it might save me something. She wouldn't risk making a greater fool of herself when she knew I had her summed up so well. Another point occurred to me.

"I'd like to bet your friends have told you you should be playing opposite me!" I stormed.

"Aren't I?" she asked, meekly.

"You're not——!" But she was—by all the curses that are she was. They had me—Maedchen-brueste had me. If ever a woman should have been insulted and overwhelmed it was that girl, with Mark Antoine not only hurling such abuse at her but acting it also. The imps were in her. Those two words made my wrath the wrath of a shadow and informed me that no matter what I did, no matter what I felt, no matter where I was, for her and for them all I would ever be just Mark Antoine, the handsomest man, their doll. I mastered my tongue and my features.

"Well, I am sorry you're through!" she remarked, twinkling, appreciative, and then: "You should be reading character at Coney!"

I hardly heard her, for I had reached the limit, and the pain in my temples recalled to me that spectre, madness, which Lady Moira had set stalk-

ing me. This joke was the kind of thing which could drive a man mad. What was it Lady Moira had said? She could not stand being something at which even she had to laugh. That was it! She was right. If this had been tragedy I should have had the blessed opiate of self-pity.

They were waiting for me to go on, eagerly, anxiously, because I was their only amusement and they were accustomed to being entertained. They did not care what I did. They would have preferred to see me making love, but if I would not do that, then a rage would suffice. But that, too, I could deny them. I turned wooden.

"Ah-lee, this lady is to have the room on the left next to Lady Tremearne's," I said, flatly. "I'm going fishing. Bring me the gear and some early lunch where you brought it yesterday!"

Ah-lee inclined his head. Ann was blushing furiously. I turned away from them all.

"You mustn't catch fish in that kimono!" Anita Shaw sent after me.

I wanted to run, but I walked, trying to do so naturally, and trying to concentrate on thoughts in which they were not concerned. Neither attempt reached success. But at least I put distance between me and them—such distance as there is in this world. I looked back once when I was sufficiently far away. They were just entering the palms, going up to my house, and a child could have read from their gestures that they were quarrelling like cats. I thought

with grim satisfaction they would be doing a good deal of that. Ann walked behind like a paid mourner. I had to smile at them.

4

This evening I had a talk with them. It was brief, business-like and to the point. We were all subdued and restrained, for since the morning we have had time for thought but not sufficient time to feel the urge to do something else silly.

I have got at the facts of the case. They each paid Captain Smyth the equivalent of about one thousand dollars to bring them here. He picked them up in Samarai, where they were wondering what thrills were to be had in the Pacific, which they found very much like Miami or the Riviera, only the drinks were not iced and the scandal and bridge were not up to standard. They found him as I found him—he deceived them absolutely. Lady Moira thought he was like an old and trusted gardener ; Anita Shaw thought he was a simple old guy. He is a genius in his way. He caught them when they were bored, drew them into talk, learnt how disappointed they were, and set out to convince them there was still romance in the Pacific. Presently, plied with alcohol, he let the fact slip out that I was here, and thereafter allowed himself to be angled for, protesting all the time that he could not do it, and finally being bullied and bought and cajoled into the very thing he wished to do.

He raised all kinds of objections. It was against the law, he said—they convinced him it was not. It was against morality, he urged, gravely—they convinced him that morality did not trouble them. Their presence might offend me, he pointed out—they convinced him there must be ways in which I need never know how they got there, and, after pondering, he had to admit that if he simply came to the entrance, towed in a raft and left them anchored there until the morning, when they could cast off, I could never be certain. It would be awkward if they wished to get away, he reminded them—they convinced him that they could pay him to stand by at night until they wished to be taken off again.

There it was, then, all arranged—and they believed they had done it. They believed their womanly cunning had triumphed. They believed they had devised a romance with Mark Antoine on his coral island which was all sugar and no salt. But Captain Smyth had fooled them.

We are all fooled. Nothing can be done. It is useless to keep guard. If we knew that Captain Smyth was lying off the entrance we should be powerless, and in the morning the latest arrival would be there just as surely as if we had been asleep. Ah-lee tells me that the garden, the sea, the hen-run, the store-room, and the tanks will keep us supplied with the bare necessities for an indefinite period, and that is as well—we are here for just that

sentence. We are not in danger of death, but we are in danger of ourselves and those who may join us.

Whatever comes of this I have made up my mind that they shall have no romance with me. That would be the great and crowning joke—that they should not only chase me but get me—that after all my protestations Mark Antoine should defeat me. I am not their Mark Antoine upon this island. If they want him they should have stayed in the cities and bought their tickets. On this I am absolutely resolved. But even to-night there were strange things in their eyes. This place, as I have written before, changes one. It is a de-civilising place. One forgets the real world here.

I know them and their charms too well. I shall adhere to my purpose, and go my own way. They can do what they like. I suppose, as a matter of fact, my object in coming to this haven was to win back self-respect. I write now that if I am so futile as to allow them to snare me I shall never lift my head again. And to this resolution—though it be a crazy thing—I will adhere. I could imagine greater and more noble vows and tests—but I am Mark Antoine and it is the kind of struggle into which I would be plunged.

It is a sorry position for the handsomest man to be forced to the locking of his door lest others make fools of themselves.

CHAPTER IV

I

IN this scene, at least, I take no part and am a spectator. I am of a mind to hide on the other side of the island, but morbid curiosity bids me watch. It will be no more than a puppet-show, however, and their laughter and their tears will not be real to me, but the mirth and grief of creatures without souls.

The sweep of the beach glistens like snow in the level rays of the rising sun. It is the same blue morn which brought in yesterday and all the days that have been. The palms sway along the half-mile of shore, and wind and surf play their eternal part. The wavelets of the lagoon slide up and retreat again, pursued by a rout of shells and broken coral. A fishing gull falls from the heights of sky to the depths of sea. The freshness of youth is on the world. It is all beautiful, but I have no pleasure in it.

For another raft has come in. It floats upon the green at the other end of the island. A puppet stands upon it, with spirit waving a signal of distress, something white which looks like a petticoat. She does not elect to arrive as others did—she is neither brave nor broken, but is victorious, declaring she has had the strength to foil the sea. Her attitude

expresses greatness of spirit, resource and strength. She stands firmly with feet apart, and flaunts the banner to and fro in a wide sweep, signalling to the house upon the hill where Mark Antoine is not. She demands that he shall come to welcome this conqueror of misfortune. But Mark Antoine is more kind. He stays here in hiding among the palms.

Instead of him two other marionettes appear in the glory of the sunlight. They step suddenly out from the background, and move across the beach, side by side, lifting their hands, hailing her with the words of puppets, silent words. She had not expected that. These figures are completely foreign to the drama she had prepared. She had created a fictitious tragedy, and these stepped into it from outside her creation, making its tragedy real, bewildering her, filling her with dismay. She waves no more now, nor is she the mistress of her fate, but stands stock still, staring. Distance makes her face into a featureless mask, but cannot conceal her consternation.

The two walk to the edge of the lagoon, and greet her in their dumb language. She listens to them, crouching forward, studies them in horror, although they are quite beautiful puppets, fittingly tattered and brown, and, in other worlds, accounted charming. They talk to and fro across the narrowing strip of water, gesticulating a little but with restraint and not as those excitable Latin puppets do. They tell her this and that, now one and now the other, and

she hears them with attention. When the raft is very close to the beach they reveal some joke to her, and, arms linked, laugh over it. Fair head and dark head are flung back to enjoy this jest which is new to the stranger who has come to Maedchenbrueste. She does not seem to appreciate or understand, but, instead, looks out to the sea. Nothing amusing is to be seen there—only the collapsing wall of the rollers in the entrance and the steaming reef. She looks back at the couple upon the beach, as a mouse might look at two cats who are merry at its expense, and the tide bears her to them.

The puppet on the raft seems to laugh suddenly, but there is neither sound nor sight of her laughter, so that it is a vague, uncertain thing, like a ghost. Now none of them laughs. They are all still, only the raft comes in upon the little ruffling, chuckling waves. And presently it grounds on the beach, and there are three figures where before were only two. They stand in a group, close together, and they have plenty to talk about. Their heads nod and wag. They go, all in a line, through the green-grey backcloth of the palm-stems to their white stone box. A Chinese gentleman appears, walks to the water, and pulls the raft high upon the beach. He considers it for a moment, and then departs.

The show is over. Another fool has come seeking to exchange the substance for the shadow—another novice had been added to the unhappy sisterhood of the island whose hills are as a maiden's breasts.

2

The bathe refreshed me, as it always does. Only in the stake-enclosed bathing-place built by the wise and good Herr von Bohn can I escape from Maedchenbrueste. When I dive into the cool depths there is an end for a little time to the house and its people, to the palms, to the trade wind and the surf, in a new world of quiet and peace and mysterious light and shadow where fishes pass like butterflies. It is soothing as dreamless sleep. But the prisoner is only on parole and must return to his gaol guarded by the very element which has given him these moments of happiness.

I dried and put on my shorts and singlet in a comfortable mood. The sunset hour freed the beauty from the intensity which through the long, blazing day made it a constant strain upon the nerves. The strong white light was softened, and the vivid primary hues of sky and sea, sand and leaf, were subdued. The West was still aglow, but out of the East the darkness came, swiftly, like an enveloping tide.

The respite was short, for the old useless rebellion quickened in me again. I stood on the uttermost extremity of my domain, but I could not escape from the house on the hill and the thought of its occupants. Turning, I scowled at it. Wherever I went it had me under observation, commanding every corner like a well-placed fortress. It was a persistent reminder. I could get no further away

and yet I saw it still above the two slopes of dancing palms. It watched me. I seemed to feel—as I have felt so often of late—the land contracting beneath my feet. When I came here this island was a place to be explored, but it shrinks into a mere speck, ever growing smaller and more crowded. There was sweet loneliness and wide freedom here once—long ago.

And so in the old moody anger which is part of life—and which no attempt at stoical resignation can banish—I walked the beach towards the hut, moving in leisurely fashion, for there was no such thing as time, studying the horizon—from habit—and the sand before me. The tragedies and comedies enacted by the crabs and shrimp-like things, the loves and lives and deaths of all those teeming races of the sand, are an occupation in these blue and empty days. I take a simple, enthralled interest in them, as a child would.

A grey-green fellow as large as a saucer scuttled for the water. I turned it over with the toe of my sandal, and considered its struggles. To it, I suppose, I was a terrible, shadowy figure, like Fate to man. It felt that I could break it, maim it, torture it, brush its life away. Its long legs twiddled and kicked in a comic frenzy, and I brooded upon it—I, Mark Antoine!—the most helpless thing in all creation, another crab upon that beach!

I do not know how long I stood there, for it did not matter, but presently the sense of being under observation intensified. I am developing a kind of

instinct in this way, like a hunted animal or a wild man. I forgot the crab, and looked up in alarm.

There was good cause. Mrs. Quinlan had stalked me through the palms, and now stepped out into the open. Since her arrival three days ago I had avoided meeting her. Ah-lee had reported she was a woman traveller who wrote books, and I had no desire to grant her an interview. I gathered from him that she had not added to the happiness of the party up there, but it was my only satisfaction. A sense of futility overcame my distaste. If she did not catch me now she would catch me another day. My struggles were those of a crab upon the beach. I had to meet her, but I knew she would be hateful.

She advanced briskly with decisive steps, her right hand raised in surprised greeting. She had no age, though her hair was mousy grey. The light about her was neutral, and so was she. Her costume was neither smart nor dowdy, but merely clothed her, and her grey eyes were set in a small face which sharply sloped to a pointed chin. Her lips though thin were wistful, as if she sought something that had been lost. She was small, almost frail. I understood from Ah-lee that she was famous, but, at this first glance, it was obvious she had remained, above all else, a woman.

"You're Mr. Antoine!" she exclaimed, and her silvery voice made it seem that this was a discovery though her manner was very practical. She held her head on one side, like a bird that spies a worm.

"I am!"

"I am Janet Quinlan. I've been trying to meet you ever since I came here, for though I understand your feelings and appreciate your desire for solitude I doubt if it's quite good for you!" Oh, her manner and her tone! She was going to be a big sister, a mother to me. I glared at her through the swiftly deepening dusk, but I felt restrained from rudeness by some mysterious power. Those others I could insult, but not Mrs. Quinlan. It puzzled me. "This is a strange adventure into which I've blundered, but that is my way. I am"—her smile brightened—"a kind of Flying Dutchwoman, you know, doomed to sail the world all my days, and to such a one adventures come!"

"Oh, yes!" I said, curtly.

She soothed and chided me with a gesture.

"I feel I owe you an explanation," she admitted.

"I have heard those explanations!" I told her.

She brushed that away.

"I thought it was such a beautiful idea of yours to go into retreat in the wilderness—particularly so in view of the fact that you're Mark Antoine. I think I can claim to understand human nature, and particularly masculine human nature. Somehow I have always been a pal to men, a comrade, you know!" And then I had it—then I knew what was wrong with me. Sex with her was a holy amulet and a talisman; it was her passport and had been accepted at every frontier. Although she had adven-

tured with men in desert and snow, on mountain and sea, not one of them—not even the lowest native porter—had insulted her. And her explanation would be that she treated them like human beings and they responded. She was privileged anywhere in the world, but not on Maedchenbrueste, where things were different, and human nature was different.

"They've trusted me, and I them," she was proceeding, softly. "This was something new to me and I was impelled to see it for myself. I thought of you here, and I wondered what was in your heart. Somehow one expects other things from a picture-actor." Her eyes appealed to me to take no offence. "It struck me—well, really, Mr. Antoine, as something quite beautiful."

There was patronage in every word, but worse than that was the knowledge that she was as perfect in her way as the rest of them. She would say everything she should say; do everything she should do. I was being mocked again.

"Did it strike you that by intruding you'd spoil it all?" I demanded.

"I think you do me an injustice! Appreciating your desires, I had no intention of intruding——"

"But you did!"

"I came here from very different motives from those of your other guests. My visit was to have been brief—perhaps two days, just a few hours' yarning with you—but Captain Smyth has decreed otherwise!"

"Curse him!" I said.

The darkness was deepening, and the stars were dropping down out of space, brightening as they fell. She was fading more and more, becoming intangible, a gentle voice.

"*I* understand you," she said, and I was rebuked for lack of appreciation. I felt her unseen, mousy eyes seeking the secret places of my heart. "Foolish girls try to make you into a mere popinjay and Adonis, but I know you to be a very great deal more than that. I am sensitive to the depths of your character, and I know that this act of yours reveals your spirituality!"

Spirituality!—all this had happened before. The impression was too strong to be no more than one of those fleeting echoes from another life—it was an actual memory. In some dark corner of my mind I found the clue to it.

"Mrs. Quinlan, didn't I meet you at an afternoon party just outside London—north of it somewhere—last summer?" I asked, abruptly. "I've forgotten the place and the people's names, but I remember you!" Remember her?—her voice brought back the very atmosphere of that long, crowded room, the dusty green trees outside the windows with the salmon-coloured curtains.

"Last summer? No, I was in Tibet last summer!"

She was politely sorry that she had been in Tibet, but I was sick with mirth, light-headed—Tibet!

Oh, hell, she said Tibet! Anywhere else, and it would not have been such a joke. Tibet——! But my anger remained sharp, for although this was a joke I was as much its subject as she. Her magic could not prevail now, her womanliness was no protection against Maedchenbrueste. I laughed, wildly.

"You would be!—oh, you would be," I said. "But it doesn't matter. If I didn't meet you in London, I've met you in Boston and Paris!" I heard her gasp of surprise. "Not you and yet you! I ran away from them, but I can't run away from you, and so I'm punished. You've caught up on me now—you've got me cornered." I knew she was going to protest. "Don't," I urged, "don't waste your breath. I could tell you what you are going to say!"

I could not save her; she said it.

"Please——! But, there, I understand you. You are a mass of nerves. Perhaps it's just as well I have 'intruded' here. You must leave that hut and return to the house. You need a woman's sympathy, care and attention. You are a sick man!"

"I know I'm sick," I cried, "but I'm not a baby, and——"

"All men are!" she said, with tender wisdom.

Neither Lady Moira nor Anita Shaw had been as bad as this. She was cloying as honey. It was like being wrapped in cobwebs. I raged against her.

"Be quiet—stop! All I want is to be left in peace—to be left alone. Can't you understand how

I feel? Can't you see you—all of you—are about as soothing to me as vultures hovering over a dying man? You—you came here chasing me just as much as the others did. But they were only after my flesh. You want my spirituality! I haven't any! I'm Mark Antoine!"

I could not go on, but stood stiff with anger. It was dark now. There, very close, she forgave me with a sigh, as a nurse might.

"Come," she said, "you must listen to sound sense. Come, my poor boy, you're ill!"

That was too much. I was suffocating, chloroformed by her insistent graciousness.

"You're the worst of them all," I flung at her. "I'm not your boy, and it's you women who are driving me mad. Keep away from me, or I won't be responsible for what happens. I won't stand any more of this. They were bad enough, but you——! You make me into a clown ten million times more surely. You'll drive me raving mad! Get away! Don't speak to me again! Get away! Get away!"

Mrs. Quinlan turned and went, without another word. She shamed me and humoured me. I longed to fling coral at her, like a naughty child. I stood there in the darkness, the sport of mischievous imps. High above, in heaven, the light of the house shone, mocking as hope. I shook my fist at it—I, Mark Antoine, the shadow in the night, a crab upon the beach.

Along the shore I went, but I had a friend—a

good, understanding, true friend. She was a spectre, and she forgave all my trespasses.

3

She came with me to the very door of the hut, but there she left me. This hut which is my home has been my salvation. It stands beneath the palms, far—or as far as may be—from the house, and it looks out across the beach and the lagoon. Herr von Bohn, no doubt, kept a boat in it. It is roughly built of palm fronds, but the weather is so warm and unvarying that its primitiveness is no hardship. The wind blows through it, and the stars look in, but, at least, I dwell alone here. The floor is white coral, and vermin scuttle across it. Ah-lee has arranged my bed cunningly. A mosquito net covers it, and its legs stand in basins of water into which he has poured some acid stuff which is sudden death to venturous swimmers. I sleep well here, better than I did in that great house on the hill.

There is no other furniture in the hut, but before it stands a small table and a chair, and a lantern hangs from a pole. I do not seem to need anything else, or to miss all the fittings of civilisation. The changes this place makes in one are extraordinary. If it were not for those women I should be no more the Mark Antoine who was than I am the Mark Antoine who might have been. The pampered darling of the best hotels, the man whose slightest whim was law, whose room had to be—so ! and his

clothes—so ! and his food—so ! would have been killed by a day in this place. And yet its very primitiveness and starkness are the things that are keeping the new me sane. There is no petting down here, no fussing, no softness. Human stuff is queer stuff. I began in the hardships of the circus, I became the very essence of luxurious civilisation, and now I am a savage, a fisher of the sea, a dweller in a hut. And through it all, I suppose, that which is the real me has been the same, but its outward manifestation has varied with every change of setting, like a chameleon.

Ah-lee awaited me in the radiance of the lantern which was dimmed by the cloud of insects hazing about it. He does not change. He might have been carved in old ivory, and his pyjamas were as clean as if they had been newly bought for him by his master. His glasses tilted at the old gay angle, his eyes looked out stonily, his head shone. Sometimes I regret that he is not a human being, but again I have to recognise that it is well there is one of us who remains adamant amid all the folly, and who has no nerves, no heart, no soul—one who sees no humour in Maedchenbrueste, and is impervious to its influence. Ah-lee's perfection, alone, is not a source of trouble. No, I am glad he is not as the rest of us.

He had set the supper. It was typical of our diet : scrambled eggs, a piece of fish, sweet potatoes in lieu of bread, and some fruit. I brought to it the right sauce, and craved no delicacies. My only

craving does not concern what I eat or drink or where I lie—it is to be alone, and that—here in the wilderness !—is as unattainable as *pâté de foie gras.* Peace would be more refreshing than champagne in place of the lime-juice.

I nodded at Ah-lee and he greeted me respectfully. He did not jabber at me, he did not trouble to explain that he was as good as a father to me, he did not inquire into my health or my soul, or declare that the sight of me gladdened his eyes. To him I was nothing but his master, and he served me with blind obedience. If my face had fallen off, if my reason had gone, I do not believe it would have made the slightest difference to Ah-lee. But—may Confucius, or whoever it is, bless him !—he did not tell me so.

The lantern swayed in the wind, causing the night to close in and be forced back again. I ate in silence, watching the stars and the deep darkness over the sea, and hearing the song of the palms. But there was no escape from the house on the hill. In the gloom I saw the protective spectre of Mrs. Quinlan standing guard over me. What a tribe they were !—but what else could be expected of women who had pursued Mark Antoine into the depths of the sea ? Well, much good it had done them !

" Ah-lee, what do they do up there all day ? " I asked. " What have they been doing to-day ? "

He inclined his head a little, and answered in his smooth, toneless voice :

"Sir, they talk about you. They talk a great deal —they are never silent. They do not like each other not at all, and, sir, they fight with words a great deal. Each gets upon the nerves of the other, sir. Sir, sometimes they quarrel, declaring they will never speak to each other again, but always they do. And at times this one takes that one aside, and says, sir, what is in her mind of the third lady, and when those two fight the third lady is told what has been said of her. So, sir, it goes. The maid-servant weeps a great deal!"

He was silent, looking out into the night as if he reviewed therein a great mass of words—a mountain of human speech—which would have saddened him if it had mattered. It saddened me. In the shout of the wind there seemed to be a rumour of endless chatter about Mark Antoine, his mind, his soul and his body—an endless verbal dissection.

"But they must have something else to do?" I protested.

"Sir," Ah-lee said, "they watch you. They watched you this morning when you were out amongst the coral fishing; they watched you when you walked, sir, upon the shore; they watched you when you swam!"

"Did they?" This was irritating. I had ascribed that feeling of being under surveillance to my own nerves, but they were actually doing it, pursuing me everywhere with their curious eyes.

"There is another thing, sir," he went on.

"This afternoon there was trouble, sir, because Miss Shaw told Lady Tremearne that she should not be watching you when you swam, and her ladyship, sir, said that that was just her prudish American mind and that it was only like looking at a statue——"

"As a matter of fact, I suppose it was!"

"Sir, Lady Tremearne had the binoculars. She had found them, sir!"

This was damnable. I was being turned into a peep-show for their amusement. They had no occupation up there save me, and they wanted all of me. The island was a coral fragment on which there was no decent seclusion. It was like one of those dreams in which one finds oneself naked before a great throng of people. I am not modest, I did not care, but their shamelessness was abominable. It made me realise to what we might be brought. The Lady Tremearne who had come ashore on that raft ages before would have no more thought of acting in this way than she would have thought of making such an exhibition of herself. I turned on Ah-lee and commanded him to get possession of those glasses, to steal them if necessary, and to hide them. He assured me he would—and that was all that could be done. No punishment for the wrongdoers, no humiliation for Lady Tremearne, only punishment and humiliation for me, and a thought to spoil the pleasure of my evening swim.

Poor Ah-lee! He had done no wrong, but I swore at him. He did not mind. He cleared away the

dishes, and left me. I am going to turn out the lantern now and go to bed. Too many insects are attracted by the flame, and thought is only a path which leads to chagrin. My spirituality! A statue!

4

But having turned out the light, I did not go to bed. I sat there meditating whether it would be worth trying to send out messages for help in bottles —a project which had been much in my mind—but the more I considered it the more hopeless it seemed. The chances of them getting out of the lagoon were slight enough, and beyond that lay the sea which had no end. I pictured myself kneeling on the beach and pushing out those sorry messengers, watching them bobbing on the waters, coming back to my feet again, drifting idly within the reef—and put the idea aside as only another delusion which would bring me to ridicule. And being thus embarked I had occupation enough, though it led me nowhither. I should have given much for a pipe or cigarette, but they were of the past.

She came suddenly, noiselessly, the palms drowning the sound of her footsteps. There is no word to describe the darkness—it was like a solid mass in which she was but a pale blur. She was beside me before I knew it. I sprang up, instinctively falling into a defensive attitude, and faced her, peering.

"Who is it?"

"Mark Antoine, you call yourself a man, but I'll say you're a poor kind of thing!"

It was Anita Shaw. Her breath was on my face. I could not see her, but I knew that she was braced and taut, that she leaned closer towards me. Her voice was husky and low. She brought excitement. I was alarmed and troubled.

"What do you want?" I asked, and though I wished to speak in a normal voice I whispered.

"I want to talk to you, and that's what I'm going to do! I'm sick of that house up there and gabbling with women. Girls and I have never got along—but these weeks have been worse than hell. I'll run mad and bite 'em if I don't get a let up. I've come to you for a change, and you can't do anything! How can you get rid of me? You calculate you know me—well, I wonder if you know how I feel? I'm desperate, I tell you. This place, the sun, the nights—and nothing to do—not even a book! Nothing! Nothing! Except to think! And you—down here!"

The words had run faster and faster, her breath was short, gasping. She laughed bitterly. I had been expecting this, and I remembered my vow. She had made her bed and could lie in it—alone.

"It's no good," I said. "You're trying to 'vamp' me!"

"That's the very thing I am doing," she swept on. "Oh, I know it's novelette passion and all that stuff, but it's the way this place has made me. I feel bad to be going on in this fool way, but we've been here years, maybe we're here for ever, and I

can't sit around any more twiddling my thumbs and hating. I've got to do something. I'm flesh and blood and I've always found something to do. This place is not going to beat me. It's rubbed me bare, like it was emery paper. I came here for a joke, and fell into such a joke that it's the most serious thing ever happened. I'm going mad, I tell you, and I won't stand it. I don't care, I won't go mad!"

There was a sob in her throat, and she swayed from side to side. I was thinking: Look out now! Look out! Remember, you're lost if you do! She wants to make you into a sheik, into a great big brute lover! This is the effort to win the bet she has to lose! Look out! I was as alarmed as if she had held a knife at my throat. For so much depended on this, so much that did not appear on the surface. To let her win was to meet defeat, and to-morrow would remain. But as I thought in that moment it was not so clear. It was only an insistent warning hammering on my brain. This in itself was a peril. The lapping of the water on the shore spoke of the prisoning sea, the palms curled and tossed above us like a breaking wave, and there were many hot stars. The wind shouted and hurried. Everything fought against me, and for her. It was intoxicating; recklessness swept up. What did it matter? What did anything matter?—dreams, or vows, or sense. This was a scene made for Mark Antoine. Look out!

She seized my arms at the elbows, tightly. I

wanted to thrust her away; I wanted to drive her off—but the palms were toppling down upon us and the night was her irresistible ally.

"I've not gone crazy all in a moment, but I've been thinking all these weeks, lonely, hungry!" My brain revolted against the words, but my senses were stronger. I was boasting cheaply within myself now. I was thinking: I could kiss this girl as she's not been kissed before. I could thrill her. She was making the shadow and the slave the very thing she wished—a sheik! I fought against her and the night and my senses which were traitors now. This was a storm-assault, and it had caught me off guard. Look out!

"Surely you've punished me enough just for wanting to be with you!—Mark—you're flesh, you're blood, you're not a saint!"

Resolution and wisdom fled. She was right. I was flesh and blood; I was a fool. Life was slipping by. I should never have been cast for the hermit's part. To the rushing, shouting wind with the sackcloth and the ashes.

And then she was in my arms, and I was Mark Antoine again, the desired of hearts.

"Anita!" I said, mouth to mouth. Fool! Dolt!

There should have been nothing else in the world—but something blundered into us. We staggered. There was a cry of mock astonishment and mock apology. Blind hands fumbled upon my back, over her arms. The effect was instantaneous and devas-

tating. We were flung out of passion into undignified confusion. We sprang apart. The darkness was like tar. The ecstasy of the moment before made the confusion greater. I tripped over the accursed chair—I, the great lover—and fell headlong, face down on the coral sands among the crabs.

"Oh, I'm awfully sorry!" Lady Moira's voice was cool and exquisitely sarcastic.

I lay as if stunned, for, indeed, the fall had been great—down into the pit. The blow to my pride and to my vanity came after many others with the greater force, and I was dazed by the certainty that I was neither hermit nor lover—but the grinning fool with the forced and painted smile, the poor cheap low comedian who tripped over chairs. And would always be—on Maedchenbrueste would always be!

"What—what d'you want to come here for?"

Anita Shaw spoke swiftly, but her lips were not for love now.

"The same as you," said Lady Moira, "but fortunately you got here first!"

The darkness, I repeat, was like tar—there were stars, there was wind, there were raving palms and the sea. We were all mad—driven mad by the mirth of our fates—driven into awful melodrama. I heard a choking cry of wrath and a sharp, short scream. We had attained to greater heights. They were fighting over me. There were strange little noises, shuffling feet, panting breath. I saw them, like the

shadows of insanity. I cannot put it down here. This horror was short-lived. It quickened even me. I sprang up, stumbled to them, found them, wrenched them apart, and flung them away from each other into the darkness. I behaved magnificently—like a sheik—but what else could I do?

I could see neither now, but stood between them.

"Go away from here—both of you!" I shouted. "Don't either say a word. Get back to your house, and stay there. I wouldn't touch either of you for a king's ransom. Leave me alone!—leave me!"

"Mark——!" Anita pleaded.

"You—go! You got me for the moment with your infernal baby vamp tricks, and here's the result. If we stay till we rot I don't speak to either of you again. I let up—and look what happens! You two fighting like women off the street——!"

I could find no more words. My head hurt. I spat. The darkness hid me from them.

"Fools! Fools!" wept Lady Moira, but she was further away; she was going into the night; she was running away from us and from herself—but she could not escape.

I stood still. The wind drowned all other noises. I heard no more, but knew I was alone. Anita Shaw's thrillings which had brought us to this had been quenched. She had gone away, too, through the dreadful palms and back to the dreadful house. Her passionate kisses were like the kisses of a dream, meaningless on awakening, forgotten. There was a

saint once, Saint—I have forgotten his name—Saint Anthony. He had his temptations. So have I. But he was a saint, and I am nothing but a buffoon.

I have walked twice round this island, stumbling on coral and fallen palms, splashing through water, tramping in a stupid daze. And now I am back at the hut again. Ah-lee awaited me. The interval between dinner and that moment might never have been. He had lit the lantern, and put the chair into position. He had prepared my bed. And, having recorded the night's happenings, I have reached a blessed state of numbness which is as kind and as pacifying as death.

After all, it does not matter. If I had not been this island's fool I should have been trapped into a grimmer situation which would have led to unthinkable complications. I have been weak, but I have been fortunate. And I have been taught a lesson. Mark Antoine may still live on the screens of the world, may still dwell in the mirror up at the house, but his spirit has gone out of me. I am not what I came here to become, but I am not he. To-night is witness to the fact. That is something —for he was a poor doll although so rich, so popular, so great. To-night he took possession of me again, but it was a sorry business. I do not think he will wish to repeat it. I think he has played his last love scene in this shell.

Ah-lee has returned with his camp-bed. He is to share the hut in future.

CHAPTER V

I

THE world was not the same. I awoke refreshed and full of this knowledge. Something had ceased; some oppression had been removed. I rubbed my eyes. The pale light of dawn filled the hut and was made more misty by the mosquito-netting. Ah-lee slept on his truckle bed in the corner. The place looked as it had on any other morn, but it was different—vastly different. It was full of peace. And then I knew; the wind blew no more—the wind, which had ailed of late, had died while I slept.

Wonder and joy filled me, for this was more than a mere change in the weather. I had never known Maedchenbrueste, save in the grip of that tyrant wind; it had blown through every hour of the day and night and through every moment of my life. It had filled my ears, waking and sleeping, sung through my voice, bent every fibre of my being with its persistent breath, even as it bent the stems of the palms so that the strongest bowed. There had been no respite. It had seemed as permanent as the sky through which it rushed. Now there was no more wind, and for the first time I realised how strong had been its influence on the mind, tossing

and troubling thought, just as it had tossed and troubled sea and fronds. Unwittingly I had been dwelling amid a riot; the riot had been quelled, the unruly forces subdued. I could dwell upon this mercy, but must hasten on to the greater mercy, the unutterable boon, of which it was a token.

I slipped on my sandals and went out of the hut to enjoy the world at rest. The palms hung still, as if wearied, the lagoon was a sheet of glass, the surf was a lazy smother on the reef and the waves lolled at the entrance. But, after one brief glance, all these things which yesterday would have been enthralling were nothing! nothing! I forgot them, lost them, rose above them and this narrow, hateful world on wings of hope. There are no words to say how high I soared.

The blue, imprisoning bowl was shattered into sky and sea, because Captain Jacob Smyth's ship came back to Maedchenbrueste. For the moment I could not believe in her—she was a ship of fancy. But I looked again, closely, with painful intensity, and she was still there, distant and dim in the greyness, but there!—rising and falling to the slow swell, heading in for the gap, though her sails were idle. I had looked for her a thousand times in vain, had abandoned hope, thought of her only as a tantalising bird of night, and now she came openly and bravely through the hush of that happy dawn.

No castaway saved from beneath the very shadow of death ever greeted his rescuer with keener delight

than did I, damned in a comical hell. I whooped like a schoolboy, and ran to the water's edge, arms flung out in welcome. Ah-lee emerged from the hut, blinking, arranging his spectacles on his nose. I shouted to him demanding if he saw what I saw. He looked out to sea.

"Sir, yes!" he said, calmly.

I denounced him as a stone image, but could have embraced him, and, hastily turning about, feasted again on the sight of the schooner. Captain Smyth had repented at last, having gone as far as he dared. My mind was a whirl of threats and unreasoning gratitude. I could have watched him being hanged without a qualm, yet there was nobody in the world I wanted to see as much. The terror went out of Maedchenbrueste; it was a place in which I had rather foolishly sojourned for a while but from which I should depart and which I should forget.

The distance between us and the schooner suddenly annoyed me. I demanded the binoculars. Ah-lee had hidden them in the kitchen. Yesterday I should have sent him for them, but upon this day of days the house was no longer to be shunned. I did not fear those silly women. Their power had gone. I raced for the house, with Ah-lee on my heels.

As I ran I laughed. The joke was on them. They had thought to wear me out, and to gain the last laugh—but I had it now. The joke in which they had involved me recoiled on their own heads. They

were no more than dope for Jenkin, the prince of publicity agents. I chuckled—what a story for Jenkin, for good old Jenkin!

Dear old Jenkin!—he had come back again. I had forgotten him, but he had returned to me, and now I valued him. As a token of my esteem I should present him with those women, and he could make what he liked of them. He could be trusted; he'd use them for all they were worth, and Mark Antoine would not suffer. I glowed with friendship towards him. All the old life which had seemed hateful once, and which, thereafter, had faded so completely that it had ceased to be anything at all—as this life's joys and woes must lose their flavour upon the other side of death—now became sweet, delightful and wonderfully real and close. Civilisation, with a wave of a magic wand, transported Mark Antoine, its favoured child, back to its heart again. And he was delighted, keen of appetite. He wanted to be nobody save Mark Antoine; he wanted nothing save that which he had flung away; he had learnt his lesson. I believe as I ran—I believe as I sit writing this—I wondered, and am wondering, in what part I shall return again to my kingdom in the hearts of the women of the world whose happy slave I am.

Weakness, I suppose—a loss of ideals—but I prefer to regard it as repentance, and believe that by being brought to realise what a fool I am here I have been cured of a folly.

I was as much changed as my world ; intoxicated with relief yet sobered, running like a mad thing, yet saner than I had been for weeks. The palms were not goaded by the wind to mock me now, nor was I one to be mocked. The disturbance had gone out of them and out of my mind. They stood still, drooping, graceful, and for all my outward excitement I, too, was at peace and myself once more. Mounting the path, I paused again and again to glance back through gaps in the roof of green. The schooner was still there, and much closer now, for from the beach she had sailed upon the horizon, but as I gained height I saw behind her the wide strip of sea she had crossed. She was nearer to me than to the sky, and that much the more real and the more reassuring.

Coming out suddenly into the clearing before the house I found my guests standing in a row along the veranda, looking out above my head with expressions of rapt delight. They were unconscious of me, had forgotten me, and they gladdened my heart. I was glad that the notorious Lady Tremearne was there, glad that the Pittsburg millionaire's daughter was there, glad that the famous traveller was there, glad that the Cockney maid, led willy-nilly into adventure, was there. They would all be flung to Jenkin, and Jenkin would fling them to the world. What a punishment ! Perhaps, by some fortunate miracle, Jenkin would be aboard the schooner. I prayed he would be. He should see

them as they were now and in the setting, for they were too good for him to miss. Lady Tremearne, alone, would have filled him with delight. She was burned black, and her own eyebrows had replaced those delicate lines. Her silver gown was a thing of shreds and tatters, and the needs of common decency had driven her to make a kind of overdress from the Spanish shawl, but this, too, had suffered. The effect was barbaric and wicked. She looked like the queen of some strange tribe of blonde savages—bare-armed, bare-legged, bare-shouldered, her fine hair roughly coiled about her head, her body erect and lithe. Yesterday she would have made me shudder with her romantic perfection ; to-day she was my perfect gift to Jenkin. And the others were as good. The discipline had gone out of Anita Shaw's curls, the straight lines from her costume and the colour from its border. She had expanded and grown more frank, appealing to many instincts now in addition to the protective one. She was openly desirous and manifestly desirable. Mrs. Quinlan, however, had remained the woman through it all. She stood between those two fine, flaunting flowers like the sweet young-old mother of the ballad success. Even the maid, Ann, in her rusty, threadbare dress was a useful member of the party—lost, bemused, and queerly tragic.

What a bunch for Jenkin !

It is easy to be gracious in victory. I hated them no more, but esteemed them and sympathised with

them, because the joke was by no means over as far as they were concerned.

"We're saved!"

They answered me with waving hands, bright glances, nods, and expressions of joy in their various tongues. We were all comrades in misfortune come to a happier dawn; they had forgotten their passionate quarrels and their bitter humours; they did not remember that I had driven them from me with curses. I am truly sorry for them, and yet their fate is no more than justice.

I have seen Captain Smyth's schooner through the binoculars which brought her so close that I could almost make out the old rogue himself standing in the stern. I am writing this now at the table, because I wish to record the end of the remarkable adventure. The women, like a flock of parrots, are chattering and fluttering along the rail, fighting for turns at glasses. We are all excited beyond telling, and only Ah-lee remains unstirred, but he is superhuman and belongs to a race so old that life can hold no new thrill for its people. Outside the veranda there is a heavy, brooding stillness, as if all this world sulks because it sees its victims slipping from its grasp. The sea admits defeat. It thunders no more upon the reef, but mumbles brokenly. I cannot write the sensations arising from this hour. They would seem overdrawn, exaggerated and out of proportion. But that would be because I have forgotten what a horrible mockery the weeks have

been. When we are away from this place I shall see it all in perspective and be able to set it down. I cannot concentrate; I cannot sit here like a scholar while the world comes to restore me to my place as one of its notable persons. What a fool I was—yesterday.

2

The schooner crept on among the little isles, among the outcrops of rock, steadily and surely, driven by her auxiliary engine. Her mission was urgent—that drab, black craft meant life and sanity to people whose lives and sanity were of some importance. It would, we felt, have been a fine business if she had not hurried—for pride had been restored to us again, though—God knows!—we had been very humble folk for over long. But the sea had ceased to be our implacable gaoler, and Maedchenbrueste had ceased to be our home. We were the people we had been before this interlude—and that meant that we were somebodies—each one of us—and worthy of consideration. Captain Smyth's haste was only decent. Foam was at her bows.

The minutes passed in a whirl of emotions arising from the recent past with its humiliations, and the past of real life with its triumphs. I doubt if one of us followed a consecutive line of thought. The mind was too busy to accomplish anything, and was, indeed, so busy that when the schooner was actually in the entrance she seemed to have been set there by magic. We ached with the sustained intensity

of our vigil, and yet were unconscious of a lapse of time. The ship had been growing in detail like a picture conceived by the mind and then—she was there !—she had come in !—we lagged superfluous upon the hill.

" Come on," I said, lowering the glasses and abruptly flung back on to the veranda. " She's in ! "

They were surprised, though they saw her position as well as I. There was no time to waste on explaining the obvious. Somebody laughed weakly, as people do when the joke has been played and they know not what to do next. I hastened from that veranda again, but this was like emerging from coma into life. I fled from the house as from a house where pestilence had been, and, as I ran beneath the silent palms, I heard the women hurrying after me, panting and laughing, tumbling along willy-nilly.

When we came out upon the beach we halted in a group, close to the calm water. With the growth of day the hush had deepened. We were still, the palms were still, there was no breath of wind. Nature seemed to be strung to our suspense and excitement. We waited ; the world waited.

Captain Smyth's nameless schooner was the only thing that moved. She cut swiftly across the lagoon, flinging out a fan of ripples. The mop-headed boys were busy on her decks, their heads like black thistledowns. And by the wheel stood Captain Smyth, a small, meek figure, in a white suit and wearing an old felt hat. He looked so faded

and humdrum that it was hard to believe he was her master, and harder still to remember he had been directly responsible for all that had come upon us. The mockery grew more shadowy and of less importance when one looked upon its directing genius. He could not have evolved anything as terrible as that which we believed we had been enduring. We were no more, surely, than the victims of a curious accident.

Alarm gripped me. We took too much for granted. What was the matter? She had passed the usual anchorage, and still held her course. I looked at those about me. They did not know yet, but stood bent forward, following her with absorbed attention, their cheeks flushed, their lips parted. They looked younger, even ingenuous. I wondered at their simplicity. Surely they should have guessed how ominous was that ship's sweeping progress, and how ominous the aloofness of her master? We—great people though we were—might not have been on that beach; the ship might have been coming in to a deserted island. I steadied myself by saying in my mind: It's all right! Now, it's all right. Don't worry—it's all right! But all the time I knew it was not all right.

She turned far out near the reef, pointed her blank bows at us, and bore back in a wide arc. The ripples drew closer along the beach. Captain Smyth gave us no sign. At intervals he spoke to the naked boy at the wheel. She came on parallel with the shore, not fifty yards out, and, while we stood watch-

ing, was broadside to us. A shouted order, and the engine ceased to cough, the ripple died, and there she sat, black in the still water and against the sky, a painted ship upon a painted ocean if ever there were one. All was quiet. The master surveyed his ship, making sure that all was in order.

The suspense was unendurable.

"Hi!" I yelled.

Captain Smyth discovered us. He walked to the side, pushed his hat back from his brow, and leant on the rail sucking his moustache. His face was kindly and grave, and he did not laugh at the sight of Mark Antoine, in pyjamas, among the worshipping women that schooner had brought to Maedchenbrueste. He looked studious, solemn, interested. The kanakas gaped. And, as one recognises the return of a dreaded enemy, I felt the old sensation of unreality, foolish dismay and impotence descending upon me. The fact that our fate should lie in the power of such a man was in itself preposterous.

"It's about time you showed up!" I shouted, the words ringing through the stillness.

I raised my fist at him, and awaited his answer. He was a complete riddle. There were so many things he could say——! His face told nothing. He studied us abstractedly. His lips moved beneath the scrubby grey moustache.

"Hullo," he remarked, conversationally, "how are you getting on?"

So many things he might have said—but nothing more staggering in its effrontery than that! It was as chilling as a curse and as binding as a spell. The man responsible for all our sorrows had come back, and on his mild lips was this unconcerned greeting. There would have been an answer to anything else, but to this there was none.

"You may—you may think this is funny!"—The words stumbled in my throat—"but you wait a while——" I saw only him, but I knew the women had stiffened with woe. "You think you can maroon us here and get away with it! You can't! Forget it! You're going to pay for your fun! The law——"

Lady Moira's hand was on my left arm.

"No use angering him!" she urged in a whisper I could not see her; she was like the voice of reason.

"What law have I broken?" asked Captain Smyth, concerned.

I could not tell him, and we were all silent as the crabs upon the beach and as powerless, while that little, pale-faced hypocrite was Fate.

"I've done nothing wrong. Various lady friends of yours, Mr. Antoine, have paid me to bring them here, and I've obliged. They wanted to give you a surprise, but that was their affair. I did my job, and my interest finished there!"

His voice was humble and modulated, and our furious eyes did not disturb him. It seemed I could have put out my hand and touched him, but he was

as safe as he would have been upon the horizon. To swim for the schooner was to court death from a shark and could accomplish nothing, for he had only to start the engine and go away, or, if he did not wish to do that, to strike a blow with a boat-hook. These considerations passed swiftly through my mind to an accompaniment of sobbing. I was the wretched and helpless knight of these wretched and helpless women. The rôle had been thrust upon me, the position created by their own folly, but now I had to save them and save myself. I could think of nothing to do.

"You've come to take us away?" I asked, inspired by the feeble hope whose roots are in despair.

"No, oh no," said Captain Smyth. "I was passing like with a cargo of benzine for Mudavela, and I just looked in. Oh no, I can't spare the time to take you away yet!"

Anita Shaw cried out, high and loud. I turned to her.

"Be quiet!" I commanded. "Leave this to me!"

Their faces surrounded me like a lot of moons. I knew they seemed very old, though their features were vague. They all looked at me, waited for me to save them—and I had thought they were dope for Jenkin. I tried to gather my wits, but it was not easy because I had that feeling of incredulity. Civilisation enures one to wonders, but not to the

fantastic. And this was all wildly fantastic, though Smyth and his schooner were so eminently ordinary. I could hardly credit that argument was of no avail and threats meaningless—that until he relented we were marooned. But it had to be faced.

"Captain Smyth," I said, after a pause which he made no attempt to break, "you're a rogue, but we're in your power. There's nothing for it but surrender. Blackmail—ransom—that's your game apparently, and we've got to bargain with you!"

The confession hurt, but it was the truth. Fantastic! Fantastic! There should have been some heroic thing to do, or some powerful aid to invoke such as we should have had in the world of men. But we were on Maedchenbrueste.

"Blackmail? Ransom?" Captain Smyth repeated.

"Your terms?" I wanted to be done with it.

"I can't talk terms—not yet! I've a cargo aboard, a special charter. You're safe enough here. Besides, trade's not so good that a man can afford to kill a good line——"

His haggling was needless.

"Your terms?"

He considered us, his face bland; we watched him in feverish anxiety, while not admitting that it was possible he would go away and leave us there. But he did not speak, for he was in no hurry and was happy. Lady Moira moved suddenly and spoke. I did not attempt to stop her. It did not matter

if she made his price higher, as long as we heard his price.

"Captain!—you know who we are! We can't be lost here without trouble starting. We're well known, we have friends! We'll pay you—all pay you—give you any bond you like not to be vindictive! Can't you see?—you can ask anything and we'll pay. We must get away from this place! It's driving us mad! Oh, captain!"

She begged, she prayed. Captain Smyth no longer reminded her of an old gardener. Her imploring hands craved the boon of his mercy, his kindness, his favour. We all surged forward; we all held out our hands; we all prayed to Jacob Smyth, the terrible, the mighty. A babel of cries broke out. It sounded like gibberish, a hopeless clamour. Captain Smyth held up his frail hand. Silence fell instantly.

"So far as the world knows you're back in Australia—the lot of you. The Pacific's a hard place like to trace anybody, particularly when you don't even know they're there——"

"Jenkin knows!" I interrupted. "Good old Jenkin!"

"I have sent Mr. Jenkin the cable you told me to send. I sent it, as a matter of fact, before I left Samarai with you. I used your code as you told me, and I signed your name. I wired him telling him to return to America immediately with the others, and await word from you, as you'd had a breakdown,

had abandoned the tour and were returning by way of Honolulu!"

He spoke gently and beamed benevolence. I passed beyond anger into cold despair. The women looked at me, pleading for an answer to this. There was no answer. I had trusted him, and he had tricked me. He had cut me off from Jenkin with a stroke of the pen. I had told him to send a wire, but not that one. Nothing to be done! Nothing to be said! I broke into a volley of oaths and curses, which did not help the position but were some relief from the leaden misery in which I was encased. Captain Smyth did not care. He waited. When, for the want of breath, I paused he resumed, as if his argument had been interrupted by an idle interjection.

"Business is business," he pointed out. "If I took you off where'd I get any more like who'd pay what people'll pay to come here now? It'd be false pretences like to bring them here after you'd gone!" He shook his head over the thought of such deception. "You're doing no harm here, and the longer you stay and the more you hate the place the higher you'll pay me for my charter." He emphasised the soundness of all this with a reasonable gesture. "It isn't as if you weren't all here of your own accord, as if you hadn't like persuaded me to bring you. Lots'd envy you!" He pulled at his chin. "Maybe like next trip I'll bring over a girls' school——!" He invited us to appreciate this sally.

"We're running out of food—out of water—!"

"You won't starve like nor die of thirst!"

He always had an answer. No threat could harm him, no prayer could move him, there was no argument which could not be set aside by a wave of his hand. He was so insignificant, and yet we were his slaves. I was stupefied. A moaning cry aroused me. Anita Shaw had started into life. She was no longer at my side, but was stumbling into the lagoon. As she moved she wrenched at her dress, freeing it from her shoulders. The water deepened about her. She ran on, slipping on the coral. Her frock fell down and floated about her like a life-buoy. Nobody else moved. She flung out her round arms. Her underclothes were threadbare. She tried to escape from her skirt.

All this happened in a flash. We watched, surprised. She seemed to be doing a clumsy dance—a ludicrous dance in the sea. She was going to try to swim to the ship. We were aloof onlookers at a hopeless experiment.

"Don't!" I shouted, mechanically.

"No good," warned Captain Smyth, calmly, "I'd leave you drown!"

Nothing else was said. The rest were like dummies. It was odd, horrible. The morning sun shone bright, the air was still. We were abandoned on the beach. There was Anita Shaw, half-naked, hopping in the sea. Odd! Horrible! We did not doubt Captain Smyth's word, and knew she did not either.

She was still, was not going to try it. We had known that all along. It would have been madness. She stood in the sea, white like a statue in a garden-pool.

Captain Smyth nodded to his crew. The engine woke. A smell of oil reached us, and rainbow splotches floated on the lagoon. He spoke to the boy at the wheel. The ship began to steal forward. It was over.

This could not be happening. It was the twentieth century, and that little man was probably a Methodist. I was Mark Antoine who acted for the pictures. That naked girl was born in Pittsburg. Lady Tremearne—her maid—Mrs. Quinlan—my Chinaman—I looked at them quickly, calling upon them to prove that this was not possible. Every line in their faces, every muscle in their braced bodies, agreed with my contention and supported it. Marooned—all of us—no, it couldn't be! And yet nothing happened to stop it.

"No!" I said aloud. "No!"

Lady Moira's face—white like a plaster mask—turned to me.

"Yes!" she asserted, jerking her head. She had not been able to believe it either.

Somewhere Mrs. Quinlan said: "Oh! Oh! Oh!"—all the time. It was Ann who sobbed. Anita Shaw was at a loss out in the water.

"No!" I insisted, for the schooner was still coming in towards the beach, although she went away from the place where we stood.

3

We did not know. How could we? How could we guess at such demoniacal insolence? Our brows furrowed, and we were puzzled.

The ship came in until disaster seemed certain, and we thought he was a fool to tantalise us at such a risk. But Captain Smyth was not of our company —we were the fools. He moved quietly away from the wheel and flung open the scuttle leading to the cabin. He thrust his head in, hunching his back. We were full of unspoken questions. We held our breath.

Captain Smyth stepped back a little, speaking to the boy at the wheel who turned the spokes. A gasp of astonishment and pain arose from us, and yet we wondered that we had not recognised this possibility and were ashamed of our stupidity.

A girl in a blue dress was on the deck. She was young, flushed and eager. She ran lightly to the rail and sprang up on it, holding to the rigging. She looked like an excited child. But Maedchenbrueste surprised her. She brushed her short hair from her brow, as if she could not credit that which she saw. And we—we looked at her in astonishment, and thought how lucky she was to be upon that schooner, warned in time of the fate of those who came in quest of romance and Mark Antoine. But Captain Smyth—grave, round-shouldered—stepped up behind her. Before we could raise the shout of warning

which was on our tongues, his arm shot out. He pushed her, gently. It was sufficient. She lost her balance, swayed, toppled forward, sought to cling to the rigging, and failing, turned the fall into the dive. Captain Smyth rested on the rail, meditative. His ship had swung now, and showed us her stern. We stood on the beach of Maedchenbrueste.

The girl came to the surface, flung up a brown arm and cried in expostulation : " Throw a rope ! " She was the protestant victim of a joke which had been carried too far.

Captain Smyth shook his head at her, as one regretting that he cannot grant a favour.

" No," he said. " Swim for shore—sharks ! " His warning was benign. All the time the ship went away steadily, widening the gap. The black schooner was impregnable as any fortress. The only sound was the thin cough of the engine driving her out to the sea. We saw the back of the girl's head, the hair plastered to it by the water. It looked like a toy balloon. The lagoon was disturbed about her, and we knew she was trying to kick off her shoes. Then she had succeeded. Her arms were less busy. But she did not know what to do.

" Swim—shore ! " Captain Smyth advised, his voice muffled by distance.

She seemed about to start in pursuit. I thought : " She'll drown ! " But she was at home in the water, and she had not lost her head. Maedchenbrueste might be alarming, but there was nothing

else for it. She had learnt about Captain Smyth. And so she struck out for the shore, swimming strongly, burying her face in the water. We moved along to meet her. Nobody made any comment. Captain Smyth stood by the wheel, his back turned on the swimmer and on Maedchenbrueste.

Then, as if someone had pulled the wires, we were all capering and waving and shouting warnings. Far out a shark's fin had broken the surface. We snatched up lumps of coral as we ran in a rout along the shore, and we cried "Shark! Shark!" But for all the creeping horror in me I was bitterly amused. There would be a shark! The scene needed that terrible fin. I was experienced; I knew. She was in danger, but the shark would not get her. Maedchenbrueste would. Yet we drank terror—because it was like wine.

To her the menace was real enough. She swam with the strength of frenzy now, moving in a silver flurry of spray thrashed up by her feet. The fin cut across the broad trail the schooner had set upon the lagoon. We raced into the sea, flinging our useless missiles, yelling, splashing, jumping about. We were genuine in our concern for her, of course, but we used her to escape from thought. The fin was no closer. She had only yards to go, but still we clamoured.

The girl reached safety, floundered, staggered to her feet. I was caught in the rush of action and excitement and ran on above my waist in water, holding out welcoming hands. She was panting, blind

with exertion and excitement, spluttering. She flung herself into my arms. Her wet young body went limp. I gathered her to me.

"That's all right," I said, soothingly. "You're safe—it's all right!"

But she did not hear me. I picked her up. In her wet clothes her weight was all I could manage. She clung to me, and thus I waded ashore, playing the hero, having done nothing brave but looking splendid. She had cut her foot on the coral. The blood spread on my pyjama coat. I was a fine figure staggering in from the shark-infested lagoon—oh, I was a gallant figure!

I saw them admiring me from the shore. They knew I was not brave but a fool. All the same they were enjoying the spectacle. Behind the people in the stalls were the servants and the decorative palms. Vexation could not save me, nor could the fact that I was doing the sensible and obvious thing.

Having reached the beach I laid her down upon the sand, and knelt by her side. They gathered in a circle. The blue cotton frock clung to her young body. Her face and arms were tanned. She was good-looking, rather than pretty, with clear-cut features which lacked the perfection of Lady Moira's. She appeared very clean and wholesome and healthy, and, oddly, I felt she was more appropriate to that beach than we were. It seemed cruel that we should have to be hostile to her. I did not want to laugh at her—she was so young. But the fault was not

mine! I checked my sympathy. She was as bad as the rest of them. We waited curiously to see the entry of this new fool into Maedchenbrueste's carnival where all the grinning maskers wept.

Her eyes opened. They were hazel, and in some fashion reminiscent of Ann's, though bolder.

"Good-oh!" she sighed, with a slight twang, and looking up into my concerned face smiled at me. "That shark gave me a scare," she apologised, and then: "I'm Ruth Dendy—'member me?" She did not expect me to. "Last time we met there was a shark scare too!—'member, out at Coogee when the club gave the life-saving demonstration for you?"

I nodded, not because I remembered, but because she had given me the clue I needed. Of course—Australian! I had seen her in hundreds on the long white beaches of Sydney. At one moment her eyes were as simple as Ann's, and in the next as wise as Lady Moira's. Her hair was short and straight, bleached yellow by sun and salt.

"When I heard you were here I just had to risk it and come. Won't stay long—he's calling for me again on Tuesday!" But the confidence went out of her suddenly. "Why—why did he shove me over?" she demanded.

We did not answer her, but someone laughed curtly. There it was—she could not escape. I had not brought her to Maedchenbrueste. Tuesday!—when was that? It did not matter, for he would

not come! Anita said: "Tuesday!" and they all laughed. The entry had been dramatic, and they did not intend her to retain the advantage. I could not stop them. They would have made it worse for her if I had tried. Their laughter jolted her upright. She looked at us, and found a strange assemblage—strange in attire, strange in composition and strange in laughter. Her puzzled eyes returned to me.

"I say, what's wrong?" she asked in consternation. "What are you all doing here? You're not like you were at Coogee! Who are all these? What's it mean? You all look so—so funny!"

I did not know what to tell her. The others did.

"We are funny," said Lady Tremearne. "You've come to the port where the lost women go, my dear!" She spoke with distressing lightness.

"Say, and you're funny, too!" Anita Shaw pointed out. She had wrapped her skirt about her, but still looked undressed.

Mrs. Quinlan sniffed. She did not approve of Ruth—this young person, who, obviously, wore very little under her frock.

The initiation ceremony had begun.

"To-day's only Sunday——!" gasped the novice, shivering.

It was Sunday—the day of respectability, church bells and a heavy dinner. Lord, funny! A large round tear from Ann's brimming eyes fell upon Ruth Dendy's arm and trickled down it. Nothing else was needed.

CHAPTER VI

I

I TOLD Mrs. Quinlan to go to the devil.

It was rude, but I had been through enough since dawn and had no patience left. Her sympathy and her silvery voice were more than I could bear. She retreated to the furthest corner of the veranda, with a little grieved smile. She was too womanly not to pardon one whose mind was unhinged. If she had abused me like a fish-wife it would have been so much easier to bear.

We were alone, for the others were in with the new arrival bandaging her foot, and making sure that her advent was no happier than theirs had been. I mopped my brow. The day had grown intensely hot, for the air lacked the lightest breath of breeze and the sun blazed from a clear sky. The weight of all the blue space pressed down upon the world, flattening the sea, crushing the life from the palms. The body felt the pressure, as it feels that of water. There had been health and activity while the wind blew, but now there was stagnation. The surf had been replaced by a tired surge, which spoke of sleep without rest. The gulls had gone. The day into which I had stepped with joy had become the sorriest in my experience.

But the real trouble was not act of God. Out beyond the reef on the sea's level plain, Captain Smyth's schooner went along under bare poles—a toy ship drawn by an invisible string. She was the only active thing, and she was the prime mischief.

The memory of the delight to which she had raised me an hour or so before rankled now and made the humiliation and dismay harder to bear. Her mission was accomplished, and she went back across the sky's rim to the world which she had brought so close. It was . . . It was . . . There are no terms strong enough to express it. I had thought she came to save, but she had merely reiterated the jest which threatened my reason. It would have been bad enough if Jacob Smyth had been content to scoff, for then we should have been the pitiful victims of his malignity, but by the crowning insolence of sending another to join us he had humbled us more completely than ever—humbled us so that we could not even mourn.

And to-morrow?—to-morrow when I had planned to look back on all this and see it in perspective. There would be no to-morrow. Only to-day going on, with another disillusioned worshipper at the luckless shrine of Mark Antoine, and the threat of another and another. Presently, when to-day had lengthened interminably, and the sun had burned us more and we had drifted further from realities and sanity and further into barbarism—what then? I dared not think. I could only rage, and raging shiver though the day was hot.

The sight of the schooner was torment. She was the sovereign remedy, the key to our gaol, the bridge to life, but the greed of a human worm took her out of reach. We, in common with all humanity, were liable to the dispensations of Providence and the chances of life, but—with all our wealth and fame and fortune—we should have been able to annihilate the captain of a trading schooner. It was not so. We had eaten dirt before him, and he had sucked his moustache and gone away.

Lady Tremearne's voice interrupted my thoughts.

"Oh, Mr. Antoine——!"

I swung about. She stood in the doorway. Her eyes were quizzical and her lips smiled, but misery lay behind her glance and the corners of her mouth trembled. I knew what she intended to do: she sought balm for her pride by hurting mine, and she was going to laugh at me because the alternative was wild weeping. I considered her soberly. She was trying to keep this going as a game. She was wise. When it ceased to be a game it might become a tragedy.

"This," she remarked, with a ripple of amusement, "is the kind of thing that would happen to you!" She had never forgiven me for that.

With a showman's flourish she stepped aside, and her place in the frame of the door was taken by Ruth Dendy. There could be no denying the truth of what Lady Moira said. In place of her dress the girl wore a blanket, pinned about her and falling from beneath her arms to her feet. With her short,

straight hair and her brown young face she looked like a quaint doll or a child taking part in a game of "dressing-up." She had been such a little time on Maedchenbrueste: she thought it was rather fun. There was cheerful impudence and self-assurance in her expression and attitude.

"Eh?" asked Lady Moira.

"Yes," I agreed. "Oh, yes!" This was all a joke—in my heart I clamoured to be laughed at.

"Mr. Antoine, I'm sorry I came here," said Ruth Dendy, but not meaning it as much as she would later on. "Lady Tremearne's been explaining to me. You don't need me to tell you anything. It's his fault!" She pointed out to sea. "I thought it would be a joke——"

"It is!" Lady Moira interjected.

"Not enjoyable—but a joke!" I insisted.

Lady Moira and I laughed quite loudly. Ruth Dendy seemed surprised.

"Then you're not awfully angry with me, are you, Mr. Antoine?"

She dared me to be angry with one so young, so good to see, so sound in wind and limb, so much esteemed on other beaches. She straightened up her body, as a proud slave might in the market. The action was not immodest. She was conscious of her body, and valued it quite frankly. Most of her life had been spent in a swimming-suit. She was a product of freedom and ardent sun, as healthy and alive as a young animal, and quite a type apart.

"No matter how annoyed I am it doesn't change things," I said. "You're here, you can't get away, and that's all there is to it. You've no right to have come here, and you were mad to come, but there's no need for me to punish you. They'll attend to that!"

I directed her attention to the sea and to her sisters. She caught my meaning. Their eyes were more candid to her than they were to me. She knew herself to be surrounded by foes, but her lower lip thrust out and her manner was defiant. She nodded at Lady Moira, rather grimly so that I had to smile.

"Why, I begin to understand what you were driving at when you talked about hating yourself and everybody else here," she said, slowly. "But this place is not going to beat me!"

"That's what we like to hear!" cried Mrs. Quinlan, cheerily.

"I'm not going to hate myself, at any rate!" Ruth Dendy concluded, firmly rejecting chaperonage and mothering. I understood her better than Mrs. Quinlan did. She insisted on independence even on Maedchenbrueste. She had learnt how to manage her own affairs, and did not brook interference.

Mrs. Quinlan tried to forgive her, but found it harder than forgiving me. Ruth Dendy walked across to the rail, limping a little, and sat upon it. The blanket fell open above the knee. She did not notice it. Mrs. Quinlan did.

"Poor Mr. Antoine!" said Lady Moira in ribald

sympathy, but again when our eyes met I saw she was afraid.

I longed for a cigarette. The lack of tobacco was a token of all that was wrong and different about this veranda and those which looked out on kinder seas. It was not the nicotine I craved so much, as the toy with which to fidget.

I was about to turn away when Anita Shaw appeared. Everybody looked at her. My pyjamas had dried on me, but Anita Shaw had changed into a sheet which she wore in the fashion of a toga. It left much of her bare. She had seen to that. She was determined to keep this theatrical. She was play-acting, because she had discovered what Lady Moira and I had discovered. She wanted to be a pretty, picturesque fool.

"Cute, I'd say!" she observed, with whimsical impudence. She flicked the sheet; she knew she could carry it off.

"Oh, very!" Lady Moira admitted, but without warmth.

The others made no comment, but it was obvious that the cuteness of Anita Shaw was not appreciated. Our position put them in a cleft stick. They did not want to be serious, they wanted to keep up the make-believe, and yet it was more essential than ever now that no advantage should be snatched by another. They were competitors, and they were grimly keen. It was to no purpose. They should have known that. The more they did to please me

the less I liked them ; the more of their pretty tricks and pretty bodies they showed me the greater monk I became—for every wile was an insult. Ann in her black dress appealed to me more than any of them, because she was sensible and honest, safe and not clever. They could have appeared before me in silk stockings and a scarlet blossom, and I should not have been excited. Maedchenbrueste's light is too strong!

The truth was that as far as their kind were concerned I was Sultan of the world and I was blasé. I had run away from the harem, but these foolish dancers had pursued me and imagined I would appreciate them. In the harem, yes! But they shall not make Maedchenbrueste into a harem. It was a sanctuary in the sea ; they turned it into a farce from which the funniness is passing leaving only a grin like a skull's—but they cannot make it into a harem without a sultan. I will not be their sultan, come what may!

The laugh, on this score at least, remains with me, and shall remain with me until the end however long delayed the end may be.

2

Without hope and merely to escape from them all I took up the glasses again. My pulses quickened. Captain Smyth's schooner was a long way out, but she went no further. It was as if the string had broken, and the toy lay helpless on the water.

" She's stopped ! " I said aloud.

There was an outburst of excited exclamations and questions, but I made no answer and heard them as a jumble of sounds. My mind was full of surmises and conjectures. No ripple at her bow now, no wake upon the flat sea—what did this mean? For a second I could not think, and then the explanation dawned upon me and I was filled with joy. After all it would not happen—could not have happened. How could we have been left upon Maedchenbrueste? All this had been no more than a shrewd ruse on Captain Smyth's part. He wished us to taste his power to the full, to understand how completely we were at his mercy, and, having held us in suspense for a while longer, he would come in to strike his bargain. Perhaps he would lie off there for an hour or more working us into a fever, but in the end he would return, and it would be over.

I chuckled, enjoying the joke. The plan was a good one, and though it had caused us further misery, I could not but admire it. I felt almost friendly towards him in the glow of relief; I bore him no grudge now that I knew he was not going to carry his plot to its bitter end. After all, he was a poor man, and we were wealthy idiots ripe for plucking.

They were all clustering about me, thrusting up eager faces, envying me my greater vision and demanding admittance to the comforting secret which I shared with Captain Smyth. I felt sorry for them, and explained.

"Don't you understand? He's not going away at

all. He's bluffing, teaching us a lesson. He wouldn't dare to go away. Don't you understand?—when he thinks we've had enough he'll come back for us, and then we'll pay him anything he asks. Before we only thought we would!"

We lacked all occupation save our fate, and our minds were keenly perceptive where that was concerned. No further enlightenment was needed. We rejoiced in broken sentences. The state which had reigned at dawn was restored. Captain Smyth's schooner might still have been coming in for the first time, and all that had happened between then and now might have been no more than a distressing trick of the imagination. Once more the chains of solitude which had bound us in such miserable association had been broken, and we escaped from each other and from our hates and troubles.

They forgot me; I forgot them. I was thinking what an Eden this isle appeared to be, and yet how fine it was to be exchanging it for the drabness of the cities. Those who wished to do so could keep the palms and the wide skies and seas, but I was for miles of bricks, paved roads and the crowded millions of mankind—I was for automobiles and bands and big hotels and newspapers and fêting and all the rest of it! I craved for the world as keenly as ever a drowning man desired life. If my appetite had been restored to me at dawn I was ravenous now.

And the schooner out there carried the world as cargo!

Poor deluded creature!—I do not know how to write what followed. The memory numbs and hurts, and seems, in some way, shameful.

I had lowered the glasses, but still watched the schooner. At one moment she was lifeless on the sea, held in the general inactivity, but in the next she was convulsed. Astounding things happened to her. Her masts fell apart, one across the bow, one across the stern, as though wrenched by unseen hands. A black cloud stained with red rose from her. There was not a sound, nothing to disturb the quiet. I was a wide-mouthed spectator. The appalling event appeared trivial and peculiar. The masts were not masts, but matches, splinters; the ship was a minute model without life, and its destruction was an unconvincing stage effect. I was more surprised and interested than horrified. The miles of still, blue air between took all the reality and terror from the crashing and rending and roaring which raged out there.

But when my wooden arms raised the glasses the tragedy leapt into being.

"Oh, God, she's gone!" I was in an agony of realisation.

The women were screaming now, and dragging at me with their hands. I fought against them, shut out their voices and concentrated upon the catastrophe. They were as buzzing gnats, but that which happened out on the sea was the greatest disaster in history.

The schooner drowned beneath a cloud. Focussing my eyes with desperate intensity I guessed at ants hurrying about her and fleeing before death. From the gaping hole where her deck had been the red and black torrent poured.

"Explosion!"

I heard them all saying what I knew—heard my own thoughts expressed and echoed on every side in different voices. The gasoline—her hold was full of gasoline. She had paused out there because something had gone wrong with her engine, and now a spark had fired the gasoline.

"It's gone off!" I remarked, as if she were a rocket.

Another denser belch of smoke went up, without a sound, an illusion of calamity, a shadow like the memory of terrible events. She was almost hidden, but I could fancy I saw her opening like a shell. The smoke rose in great gouts, though even it was dwarfed. This was a miniature reproduction of a disaster at sea. It was a studio trick—not of life at all, but of the celluloid world. I had seen such things done in a tank.

But real men drowned, and with them perished hope. The fact burned into my brain, and the ground went from under my feet. I was aboard her, with the sea sucking me down and about to close above my head for ever. I felt her going to pieces. The water ate her; she rotted as if she had been made of cardboard. There was a hell of fire and smoke. She was a ship no longer.

The whole circle of sky and water moved up and down, jerked this way and that. I steadied my hands. She had dissolved. She was far away, many miles away, but I believed I could distinguish atoms in the water. It seemed I saw her people clinging to fragments of wreckage and fighting for their lives. I knew their fate. The fire had taken some, the sea would take some, the sharks would take the rest. That unnamed ship had been smitten into nothingness while the eye winked.

" Captain Smyth's dead ! " I announced, stupidly.

The clatter had subsided, but now it began again —a high falsetto clatter painful to the ears.

" Shut-up—for God's sake, shut-up ! " I shouted, drowning their words. The hush was restored, heavy in the heavy air.

The ship was lost completely in smoke. The dark pillar stained at the base with blood, mounted in a bulging spiral into the virginal sky, where it spread and thinned to a lacy pall. The sea shone bright and smooth, polished. For all the reek of destruction it looked quiet now and deserted. There had been a ship—the ship was no more. The bowl of blue closed up again.

The air was more stifling. My stomach rose ; I felt physically sick. It was all over for them. While we had watched a spectacle they had died, and we had been sharing in their tragedy all the time and would continue to feel its effects even after they had done with it. Funny ! Funny !—the great Captain

Smyth dead in a flash, blown into a mere homeless spark. And what had happened to him now? Surely not heaven or hell for Captain Smyth? Yet the scene was shot, and what next for him? And what next for us?

I dropped the glasses, which fell into the bushes and were forgotten, and returned to Maedchenbrueste as a man might return to an unhappy home after witnessing an accident in the street. Our world of reef, sea, palms and shore surrounded and possessed me again, and the old misery was the keener for that which I had seen. I brought back Captain Smyth's fate with me, and it became part of my fate. I began to appreciate what had happened to us.

The women stood in stiff attitudes along the rail, gripping the wood with their hands and staring out to sea. From my position their faces were hidden, they were a motley row of dummies—the five of them with Ah-lee upon the further end. But they did not feel fools now, for they had forgotten themselves and me. All they knew was that the schooner had gone. To my distressed senses they were weird. They might have been dead and embalmed in crystal, for the glassy atmosphere seemed to hold them upright after the life had left their bodies. I could not think of them as human beings: they were poor dead people in a beautiful tomb.

This was a mad fancy, and I knew that it—and all it stood for—had to be fought, because there was

urgent need for clear thinking now. I stumbled away from the sight of that sea of death, and sat down upon the end of a long cane chair, burying my head in my hands to shut out my kingdom and its people. I wanted to be calm and reasonable. Things were not so bad. We, at least, were still alive. But alternate waves of burning heat and intense cold passed through me, so that I knew no peace. I was parched, and yet shivered, and my skull seemed to expand and contract. My brain felt bruised, and I was in a fog of woe. The more I combated these sensations the stronger they became.

There was no sound on the veranda, and no sound from the island. I might have been the only living soul, but as soon as this soothing delusion arose it was struck down. I was not alone. I was being watched. I stubbornly tried to avoid admitting this, but to no avail. I had to look up.

The five women had all turned, and were gazing at me. There was a mist before my eyes, and I saw them strangely, portions of them, fragments: Lady Moira's eyes, the Australian's breasts, Anita Shaw's knees. I could not see all of any one of them, but they made up a single woman in whom was combined all their bodies and souls. She looked at me in bleak sorrow and reproach, as if it were my fault. It was not my fault. They—she was responsible for all that had happened. I was the martyr to her selfishness.

My head throbbed as a tooth does.

Abruptly the one individuality disintegrated, and they were all there as they always had been and always would be. I thrust out my hands, ordering them away from me, ordering them to leave me alone.

"Don't stare at me!" I commanded. "Don't stare at me! Keep away! You watch your show out there! It's your work, and I hope you're proud of it!"

But they would not heed me. They exchanged knowing glances, talked with their eyes, said insulting things about me as if they were very superior beings and something was the matter with me. They stood still, yet seemed to come closer. I jumped up, on guard against them. The veranda was unsteady.

"This place—this was an island until you came, and that was a ship," I shouted at them. "What now? I'll tell you! That ship's nothing, this island's hell, and here we stick—all of us!—stick in this glue! And it's all your fault! We may be here for ever. They may never find us now! There was a hope while that ship floated—but you—you Australian—you brought her here full of gasoline, and now she's smoke. You've killed the man who could have saved us. By hell, this is a great joke you've played on me—you—you women! By hell, a great joke!"

I felt intoxicated and inspired. I had a lot more

to say. This had gone past a joke now. They should hear it all, and would be disposed of for once and for all. When I had finished—when I had told them just what they had done and what I thought of them—I would not speak to them again if we stayed till our deaths. They should have gall and wormwood to quicken their meditations; they should have salt upon their wounds. Thereafter even they could not be so brazen that they would dare to look me in the face again.

"For the sake of your damn-fool appetites you've killed that Jacob Smyth and his crew and cut your own throats! You came here lying and cheating and scheming to drive me mad! You——!"

But, for all my wrath, I could not go on. Something went out of me. I knew it was no use. They were starting to move towards me. I saw their hands uplifted as if they prayed for me, but knew that this was only a feint and, in reality, they made ready to pounce. The house was dancing. My head was queer. They were closing in. The girl in the blanket was a pillar of fire. Flame burned me—explosions were all about—everything was being blown to shreds. The ship had gone, and the sea was ablaze. The women had got me. They were smoke and fire. I tried to beat them out with my hands. For all my boasts and scorn they were triumphing, and I could do nothing.

The noonday sun went out in sooty night.

3

I was in a misty limbo where the sun shone without light, where there was air though I did not breathe, and where I was not dead though I did not live. It was a negative, passive, neutral state. I dwelt, inactive, behind a veil like that of death, and through its haze saw dimly and for a fraction of time.

The part of me which was on the other side of the veil was being kissed. Lips were on its lips, and arms were round its neck. These lips breathed words to it, imploring it to do something. I listened with a great effort—and that was strange and difficult because I was in a place where there was no effort, but in some way, I heard more clearly.

The lips implored that I—out there—should not die, should come to life, should awaken. They called my name, panted my name, cried 'Mark! Mark! Mark!' The arms circled closer about me. They were soft. I burned; they were cool. My lips were parched; those lips were sweet as dew. I tried to answer, tried to obey.

But I was in a void where thought was not, nor the power to answer, nor the strength to obey. I wanted to be angry and indignant over I knew not what. But already I had sinned by effort where effort was not to be. The little flame, the little light, was put out by space, ruthlessly, silently, impassively, and there was only the darkness then, I suppose, like the darkness of the deepest sea, like the darkness of the night beyond the last star.

4

My mind had nothing in it and was clear as crystal. It was a dead town under the moon. But, suddenly, it was peopled, filled with events and crowded with the commerce of the world. I thought and felt vividly. I was still being kissed, arms were still about my neck—but now I was in bed under my own roof. One of the women kissed me. The past and the present poured into my mind—or, rather, was set up in my mind complete, and the revolving stage swung round. The actresses were there, I was there, and the play of life went on.

Yet for the moment I had a fancy I was dead: Don Juan in hell eternally caressed. That passed. I was Mark Antoine, and Lady Tremearne kissed me. I could only feel her kiss, for the night was darker than any night had ever been before. I could see nothing—no white gleam of her face, no shadow, no dim suggestion of the room. I thought: blind! But I was not blind. I had not opened my eyes yet. I tried to do so, but could not. And the kiss went on, a Judas kiss betraying me to pain and shame when I was weak and helpless and newly come from the emptiness of space. I determined that there should be no more of this, and that I would assert myself again, proclaiming my independence, hatred and defiance. But I could not move. I was like a house with one bright window; like a man whose brain lived on after his heart had ceased to beat and his lungs had ceased to breathe.

Panic and horror gripped me—I was paralysed, totally paralysed, every muscle and sinew dead. But hope, which raised up man from the protoplasm, was astir, and hope instructed me that I had come a long way and had a long way further to go, but so far all was well. I had to be patient. Yet it was hard to be patient while I lay powerless as a babe in Lady Tremearne's arms, revolting against the tyranny of her lips.

A mercy came swiftly to justify hope. I heard the sound of a door opening, and Lady Moira, with a gasp, had sprung away, and my head was on the pillow. I was pleased and at ease, and thought: now I shall open my eyes, move my arms, speak. But it was not so.

Anita Shaw's voice, hushed and tense, was in the room.

"You didn't call me!"

"I was just going to!"

"If I hadn't been awake you wouldn't have called me!"

Just their voices—voices without bodies, like spirits whispering together. And Lady Moira's laugh, low but hard, and growing into speech again.

"Well, perhaps I wouldn't! But isn't it awful?—no way of being alone with him but letting the rest be alone with him, also. Two hours—and then six hours wondering what the others are doing with him. We—we should have raffled him and been done with it!"

Her words went into the same laughter.

"You give yourself away!"

How quietly they spoke that I might not be disturbed. Disturbed—Oh, God! I wanted to shout and rave, warning them, setting them on their guard for my own sake. I tried to arouse my body by conjuring up the thought of theirs. Lady Moira with the level brows and the long white fingers was quite close to me, and Anita Shaw, who had run into the sea that day and who had worn a sheet. But I could not see; I could only hear.

Anita Shaw's voice had been bitter, but Lady Moira's was more bitter because of the laughter in it.

"There's such a lot to give away!—such a lot we don't know about each other, and how we feel to him! You know perfectly well you love him as I love him and you hate him as I hate him!"

"You weren't hating him when I came in!"

"I was kissing him. What of it? You've done the same—don't trouble to deny it. But not a kiss you'd give to a man out in the world! Would I kiss a man, fevered, unshaven, who detested me—out in the world? Would I?"

A silence came—a silence which I wanted to shatter into a thousand fragments. It was like black glass.

"No," said Anita Shaw's voice then; "nor I! But it's not Mark we kiss—somehow. It's all the fault of this place we're in. You and I have been used to things happening—we've made things happen—but what can we make happen here? He's

the only thrill left on the earth—we've got to chase him whether we will or not!"

I understood their candour. They were in darkness as deep as my own, and each had lost the thought of the other save as a voice to which she could speak while searching her own soul. They believed they were alone in the sick-room with a lifeless Mark Antoine and a riddle to be read. But they were not alone, nor was Mark Antoine lifeless, though he struggled now to close his ears, to escape back into nothingness.

"You're wrong," Lady Moira's voice declared. "He's got nothing to do with thrills now. He had once—that's why we're here—but not now! I'll tell you what he is: he's the curse on Eve's daughters." Her words were very slow, fumbling along. "We don't want him, we may hate him, but we've got to fight for him. The one that gets him—no matter how—will win, and the rest will be shamed, beaten, empty-handed, on the shelf. No pose, no pretence at scorn, and no assumption of carelessness can save them. This place is turning us into savages—with only one man in the tribe. We're going back to the oldest religion. He's a—what the dickens is the word?—some kind of symbol. We don't love him; we just worship him!"

Silence, again, while they meditated upon this discovery. A symbol!—disgusting, and the more so because I felt like one; a dummy of wax with the fatal flaw of a mind; a suffering image incapable of

retaliation ; a soul in a corpse discussed by the too candid living. The silence lengthened, and then a sigh and another sigh closed on it and all it contained as the covers close about a book. But there was no cover for my mind, and I could not even sigh —I could only ache.

After a time Anita Shaw's voice returned, but it was changed now, and more human.

" Has he been delirious again ? " she asked, with curiosity.

" No," said Lady Moira, almost in regret. " He's just lain still as if he were dead ! "

That was the last blow. I had been eavesdropping and had heard words which were torture, but they had been eavesdropping, also, listening to the darkest secrets of my soul and brain, through the distorting veils of fever. Whenever in the future I confronted them in scorn and wrath I should be weakened by the thought of this. I knew the ugly monstrosities which crept out of men when the grip of the conscious mind was relaxed, and these were now in the possession of my gloating enemies—not of friends who would have striven to forget. They would be remembered against me, and used against me. I thought : now if I do not regain my powers I shall die. But I was wrong. I heard their voices murmuring on, though they seemed to have drifted away. Occasionally I caught a sentence, but a great wind blew between us. I slipped back again into the half-world, which was not a limbo now but heaven.

CHAPTER VII

I

THE room was full of sunlight, and through the window I could see the sky and the palms. I had been in that room at intervals, but only as a poor creature on parole from somewhere else. Now I was myself again, a free man. I turned over. Mrs. Quinlan held my hand where it lay upon the blanket.

She greeted me with a cry of joy, rose, and leant over me.

"My poor boy, you're better," she said. "I've pulled you through! Oh, thank God for your physique. It's been a narrow squeak—it's——"

She made ready to kiss my brow, and she would have gone on talking without end. But if I had been forced to suffer in damnable silence while I was ill I would have no more of it. The first step towards complete recovery was to rid myself of my nurses.

"Leave me alone!" I said. My voice was weak, but I heard it with bliss. I had been close to death where all was silence. "Get Ah-lee!"

She wanted to protest against my ungraciousness, but I was determined to gain peace while my strength lasted. I did not heed the rebuke in her grey eyes.

"Oh, get away!" I insisted. "Call Ah-lee, or I'll shout until they all come. Call Ah-lee!"

The threat reduced her to reproachful resignation, and drove her from the room. I felt proud, as if it were a victory. I'd show those silly women; I'd shake them off soon enough. It was pleasant to be in the world again with solid things about one—real walls, a real sky and real light. My arms were weary, but I touched my body with satisfaction. I wanted to sing. I had no thought of the future, for I was content to have returned to life, and to have escaped from the blackness, from the twining arms and from the whispering voices. The simple furniture of the room was welcoming and welcome, as home is after travel.

Ah-lee entered. He bowed slightly, and stood just inside the door, hands tucked into sleeves, the perfect Chinese servant. He allowed himself no demonstration of satisfaction or joy; I had sent for him, and he was there. In the years while I had wandered in space he had not changed. He wore the same pyjamas, his glasses sat as crookedly as ever on his nose, and his eyes looked through them, grave and empty. The sight of him was better than any tonic. I could have cried Hosanna! but that was superfluous and unthinkable, for he was my servant, Ah-lee. Mrs. Quinlan stood beside him.

"Mrs. Quinlan—go away! You hear me?" She hesitated, was grieved—but obeyed. "Ah-lee, close the door—lock it! You're not to leave this room

and no one else is to come in until I give the word!"

All happened as I ordered. Ah-lee produced a key from the belt beneath his coat, and turned the lock. At the same moment somebody knocked. He paid no attention, but walked to my bedside.

"Why did you leave me?" I demanded.

"Sir, I am a servant!"

He apologised, and I accepted his apology, though in my heart I was calling him blessed. There was peace now. I lay at ease, considering the bright room. The world was very quiet. I felt sleepy—not exhausted, not wretchedly weary—but sleepy. And so I slept. When I awakened, Ah-lee fed me on whisked eggs, and I slept. When I awakened, Ah-lee fed me on fish, and I slept. When I awakened, Ah-lee fed me on chicken, bathed me, shaved me—and I was well.

But I have not left the room yet. I have had ample occupation with this writing and my thoughts, and it has not been a waste of time. Ah-lee assures me that it is only four days since the dawn when Captain Smyth came back and went away for ever. It seems like four centuries. My memory is remarkably clear. I am little the worse physically for the sunstroke, fever, brain-storm or whatever it was. I suppose the healthy life I have led here has much to do with that. But my sense of humour is dead. I can see nothing funny in our lot now, and our laughter seems like madness.

From the schooner, Ah-lee tells me, not so much as a piece of timber. The news caused no disappointment, for I had expected nothing else. The happening, indeed, seems as unreal now as when it occurred. How could there be survivors from a toy? Captain Smyth has gone: that is all—he no longer figures in our life, and yet he remains its evil genius.

Maedchenbrueste is still embedded in hot, liquid glass. I can see the palms trooping down the hill and up the other slope. Sky and water are more brilliant than ever, and their wall seems more complete. The isle is anchored until the tides are no more. What are we to do?

A cuckoo made in Geneva has just told the hour, for, in an attempt to realise that time still exists, I have had Ah-lee wind up the clock in the hall. But the Geneva cuckoo is not a native of Maedchenbrueste; the hours it tells are those of another country, another earth, another life. We cannot measure time here. Four days may seem like four centuries, and yet it is hard to comprehend that the schooner is not still just beyond the reef. I nearly wrote that it is funny. But it is not funny—it is merely queer. Maedchenbrueste is a queer place. I feel frightened of it. We are natives of Maedchenbrueste. I wonder what is to become of us. One thing is certain: I go down to the hut on the beach again, and though they worship me as a symbol, though they hail me as the curse on Eve's daughters,

though they tempt me with the allurements of ten thousand Circes, I shall adhere to my resolve.

We cannot afford to risk any foolery. This is serious. I am going to tell them just what I think of them.

2

Despair would be a better friend on Maedchenbrueste than this illusion of hope, which gives no peace. We watch the horizon—God, how we watch the horizon! Whenever we turn our eyes away we are sure that the smudge of smoke must be there, but, of course, it is not. I cannot settle down to write. I have been sitting here fiddling with the pen for a long time. My thoughts stray away across the sea; my glances wander into the blue. I came in here to escape from the incessant vigil, and yet I have to fight a temptation to go out again and make sure there is nothing in sight. I know it would serve no purpose. The tiniest smear would set them yelling in a delirium of joy.

A ship *must* come! We have told each other that with painful insistence, we repeat it over and over again in our minds, and yet in our hearts we know that a ship may never come. Hope springs so largely from the vanity of the human soul, and we have no vanity left. If we had not been mocked and jeered at by fortune, we should say: This cannot happen to us! But although the farce has become a tragedy we have no pride left. We have been stripped of that—we are nobodies, powerless, defenceless, any-

thing can happen to us. Our greatness in the world is as useless here as the travellers' cheques in my trunk. An illusion of hope!—and yet it goads us on to scan the sea and scan the sea again. If only we could despair!

Life has changed, and we are changed. That which was of primary importance yesterday seems trivial now. I thought, before I left this room, that the vital question was my relationship with them. I had planned to rebuke and scorn them and fling at them their own words which I had overheard. But when I stepped out on to the veranda and into the brooding quiet of Maedchenbrueste I forgot all that. They did not matter to me, nor I to them. We were preoccupied with the riddle of how long we are to rot here. They greeted me kindly, but absently, and their faces—lined with long gazing at the sea—turned to me wistfully, hoping that I had solved our problem. The quiet of the world possessed the moment. There was no melodrama now, no bitter humour. We were hushed, as if in the presence of death.

"A ship must come!" I told them, when we had exchanged meaningless greetings and vague comments on my recovery.

They nodded emphatically.

"Of course!" they said, and "Yes!" and "That's so!"—but as they spoke they looked past me where I stood by the rail, they looked past me at the empty sea.

"They'll search for us—they'll find us. Smyth can't have kept his secret so well that no one knows! Some ship will come——!"

There is no need to write it all down. I have not the patience to do so, for I am haunted by the ghost of hope we summoned up. We discussed our position at length, frightening away thought. We tried to be flippant and philosophical, but we failed. The very idea that we might have to stay for some time on Maedchenbrueste was branded as absurd. This was the twentieth century, we asserted stoutly, and a ship had to come. Every brave statement was greeted with a chorus of approval, and yet the truth which was deep in our hearts kept slipping out, and then silence and uneasy glances betrayed us.

At one stage Mrs. Quinlan said: "This island is in a kind of pocket. No trade routes pass here!"

We all wished to contradict that, but we could not.

"In the ordinary course a ship might not pass Maedchenbrueste in a hundred years!" I admitted, against my will.

Not a ship in a hundred years! We stared out into the hot, still morning, which confirmed every fear. The sea, the sky and Maedchenbrueste lay beneath enchantment. A miracle was needed to break that spell. We were modern people, and we had no faith in miracles. I avoided their eyes. I searched the horizon in quest of the miracle in which I had no belief.

"We must light a great fire on the hill," I told them. "It's our only chance. We must burn damp wood, and send a column of smoke up into the sky. Then, when the ship comes, they'll see it!"

The suggestion quickened us all. It was something to do, offering escape from our meditations and from the horizon. We hastened to put it into effect. I shouted for Ah-lee, who came, undisturbed, from the kitchen. The women bustled about chattering. Everybody was eager. We found the axe and hurried out to the hill-top, almost happily, as though we had discovered a path leading from Maedchenbrueste.

All through the day we worked, and now our cry for succour ascends into the blue. It goes up and spreads into a thin dark canopy above us. We stoke the fire with a kind of religious frenzy, rejoicing in the smuts which settle on us, rejoicing in its parching heat, because we feel that these things show we are making an effort. At first we stood about it jubilant, glancing to the sea as if expectant of an immediate answer to such a strong appeal. But that wore off. Nothing happened.

The smoke rises sluggishly, and all about sea and sky encase us. Still it is something accomplished, and we have every right to feel satisfied. I should think it must be visible fifty miles away. It must be seen.

If it is not——? If no ship ever comes——? The thought has to be faced, as everything must be faced on Maedchenbrueste. This is not the world

where so much could be avoided, neglected and overlooked. There can be no evasion here. I feel panic. Here am I, Mark Antoine, with these five women. Here I may stay for years. What is to happen to us? How long shall we be able to bear the blank monotony? I am intimidated by the naked future. I cannot dwell upon it. I must go out and make sure that the women are keeping their watch.

Then I shall shift my things down to the hut again. It is a needless precaution at present, for I could not say what one of them looks like, and their attitude is as changed to me, but it is well to be on the safe side. If we are going to be here any time the situation will need careful handling. There must be no mistakes. I do not know what we are going to do with the long, empty days. When will a ship come? When will this hell of feeble hope give place to sanity and the old, dear life where such things could not happen?

I do not want to go out to the wide sky and the wide sea, and yet I must. I might miss the first glimpse of our blessed rescuer.

3

No ship yet—but one may come at any moment. These night watches are the bad hours. There are so many stars, but no lights. The eye is often deceived. One starts up in an agony of joy, stands breathless, clutches the glasses, and then, forewarned of disappointment, focusses upon the bright spark

so close to the sea. It springs closer and at the same time recedes into space. Another star has risen. No matter how often the experience is repeated the ghost of hope deludes the mind.

Ah-lee and I stand guard during the hours of darkness in two watches—nine to one and one to five. It is queer sitting in this bowl of fire, which, emphasising the surrounding darkness, gives a sensation of being suspended in space. The night is full of loneliness. The shadowy house has no suggestion of life. No light will ever shine from the house again. We slip back into the primitive. Until this became serious I had not realised how far we had gone. Ah-lee has attended to the details of existence, so that the landmarks have passed unnoticed while we deplored what sorry fools we were. We have no more fuel for the lamps, and have been out of matches for a week. Ah-lee has kept the fire burning. If it went out we should have to light a spark by friction or from the sun's rays. This is a significant and alarming fact. We are back in the stone age ; fire has become a treasure above rubies. Mark Antoine, civilisation's darling, is the savage gloating on the flame he is fortunate enough to possess. It cannot be. I feel that I have died and been born again as a Papuan.

This cannot go on. We must be restored to the world. I am crazy for the old life. A thousand little, simple things occur to me—things which were taken absolutely for granted once—and the simpler

they are the more keenly I want them. An olive, iced champagne, the baseball scores in smudgy ink, a grill, the sky signs—I could go on filling page upon page with such words. I want to get on with the business of my career, to return to my friends, to hear all the news, to re-establish contact with the millions of mankind. The equipment and the luxuries of living have been stripped away, leaving only the stark and tiresome business of keeping body and soul together. We, who were complex parts of elaborate complexity, are becoming animal organisms which can breathe, move about within a narrow radius, sleep, take in food and experience the elemental emotions of sex. We are higher than some organisms because we can think and feel pain, but we are as powerless as the lowliest creature floating in the sea. And all the time the precious days of life run by uncounted, wasted, and the splendid pageant of the world goes on behind the sky.

Even the sufferings and the calamities of that pageant would be welcome now. There would be dignity in enduring them, and the promise of a better day. There is no dignity here, and no to-morrow. Our sufferings are those of jelly-fish in the sea.

Hope grows more mocking and more shadowy. I do not believe this signal-fire will ever be seen by any eyes save ours. I dare not tell them so, but it is true. We must keep it burning, however, for there is nothing else to do. I am no coward. If the way to escape were perilous but quickly at an

end for good or ill—a chasm to be leapt across or an armed guard to be overcome—I would make the attempt no matter how great the odds. I have the courage of desperation. But I cannot voyage across the sea. It would be suicide by torture. The raft is a mere patent float, and the weather has rotted it. It would not hold together a day. The sea goes to the sky's rim and far beyond. It is dead calm, and if the wind blew, any craft we could make would be overwhelmed. I could not even steer a course. There would not be the slightest chance of success—not a chance in ten million—only the certainty of death out on the limitless ocean beneath the blazing sun.

But something must be done. We shall go mad otherwise. I am not a fire-worshipping barbarian—I am Mark Antoine.

There has been an interruption.

A voice spoke out of the darkness.

"Don't look round," said Lady Moira, "because they mustn't know I'm here. I want five minutes with you—five minutes' sensible private talk. Put some wood on the fire, and then come out here where we can't be seen!"

I was startled but not displeased, for I had been lonely, and her tone, though hushed, was friendly. My thoughts were unhappy companions. I think I must have been dozing over my writing, lost in restless dreams. The manner of her command sur-

prised me. I had forgotten that they might still be jealous and watchful—indeed, I had not been thinking of them at all but only of our position. Now, however, I acted as she suggested without question. Throwing some fuel to the flames I sauntered about looking into the night, and presently passed out of the glare.

We met on the edge of the clearing in deep darkness. The fire upon the hill-top flung flickering arms towards us, but we were beyond its reach. The stars were above, caught in the palms. The crackle of the burning wood and the song of the insects were the only sounds.

"Mark Antoine," she said, "no ship may ever find us here!"

"True!" I answered.

We spoke in whispers, standing close together, masked and cloaked in gloom.

"What is to become of us?" she went on. "People—ordinary people who'd been accustomed to monotony and hardship and dullness—would grapple with this better. We've always had so many toys—and now we've none. That's why it's hard for us. We're millionaires reduced to penury, and it hurts more than if we'd never known wealth. We're lost without the riches of the world!"

"I've been thinking the same kind of things," I replied.

We were silent, pondering. Conflicting emotions met in me. I was comforted by this other soul who

was afraid ; she was of my own race in the enemy territory of the night. But she was also Lady Moira Tremearne. I re-discovered her as the individual. I wanted to tell her what I had heard in the sick-room, and to warn her against such folly. But I could not do so. I searched my mind for something which arose from these emotions, and suddenly I found it.

" There's one point that's important," I told her. " There's neither room for love nor hate on Maedchenbrueste—there's only room for keeping alive ! "

I felt pleased at having reached the crux of the matter so neatly. The past was past ; recriminations were useless, and I had found the only grounds upon which this adventure could be carried through.

" Neither love nor hate ! " she repeated after a pause. " No—neither love nor hate ! You are wiser than I thought. Those things belonged to the happy days when we were only mocked creatures. Neutrality—that's the way out of it ! " She spoke in a manner which revealed earnest thought. And then, breathlessly, she added : " Ah, if only you weren't here how much easier it would be ! "

" If I weren't here," I pointed out rather grimly, " none of us would be here ! "

She tapped with her foot, sharply.

" That's past," she declared. " We're not here to apportion blame. God knows we fools have been punished enough. We're even now. I only want

you to understand. You look at everything simply from your standpoint, and the time's gone when it didn't matter. You must think for us as well as yourself now! You have a responsibility. We are a tribe—none can stand selfishly outside it. We may have made you miserable, but you make us miserable. There are five of us—we are the majority. Perhaps we have as much cause to hate you as you have to hate us. How smoothly life would run if there were no man on this island—how vastly simpler it would be without Mark Antoine!"

She weighed every word. I listened with attention, indignant and yet impressed. The charge of selfishness is one which nobody will ever be convinced is justified, and yet her accusation had dignity and force coming from the gloom, like a pronouncement by a shade of the heart of night, or by one's conscience. It was disquieting. I tried to treat it lightly.

"Are you an emissary sent to threaten murder?" I asked, but the jest sounded futile even to my ears.

"No," she answered, quite seriously, "I am not an emissary. We have not reached the stage yet when we can come to a frank understanding about you. And yet, I suppose, I am here on everybody's account. You're right—there's neither room for love nor hatred on Maedchenbrueste, nor is there room for selfishness. That is what you've got to learn—that is what I came to warn you against, though I did not know until I met you. We've got

to start afresh. We've been making fools of ourselves over you. But it works both ways. You're not exempt. You cannot be a fool any longer!"

"But——!" I began, though, indeed, I had no answer.

"Oh," she said, "that's in the past. I know you heard me talking to Anita Shaw—you jabbered about it in your delirium—but that's in the past I tell you! What if we did kiss you? We were fools then. We're not fools now! And you've got to learn the same lesson!"

Her tones were not crystal hard as they once were, but they thrust at me like a bright blade. Sweat stood on my brow. I had no words. The pedestal on which I had set myself, and the attitude I had adopted, were gone in a twinkling. I was left fumbling on the earth. She humbled me, and astounded me. I had imagined I was so much wiser than they were, so much stronger on Maedchenbrueste, and all the time they knew and read and judged me. As I write I wonder that I did not attempt to justify myself, to defend or attack, but I am glad I did not. I can admit here that she was right. They had looked honestly and clearly into our position, while I had been content to consider only what suited me. Again we stood in silence. Had it not been for the sound of her breathing I might have been alone.

At last I said: "We are all learning—we have a lot to learn!"

It was hard to say. She rewarded me with a sigh of gratitude and relief.

"We are learning!" she agreed, gently. "I'm glad I came to you. I hesitated—I thought you might impute motives, be dishonest. I'm so glad you haven't. I knew it would be all right when you said that there was no room for love or hate on Maedchenbrueste. I think, after all, it will be wiser if I tell the others what we've said to-night."

"Neutrality——" I began, vaguely, but checked myself. I listened. She was not there. I thrust out my hands, seeking her. The night was empty. I had an impulse to call her back, but put it aside. We had said all that was needed; we had done well. It was an intangible victory, but it was a victory. I am full of admiration for her. I might have gone blundering along indefinitely, seeking to evade the issue on Maedchenbrueste where there is no room for evasions. I have been compelled to meet the situation. Friendly neutrality was the obvious thing, but to have suffered together and been mocked together does not make for friendship in every case. In ours it did not. It set us further apart. Of course, we are far from happiness still, and far from peace, but at least we have begun. This Maedchenbrueste is not like the world. New values rule here. Hate!—there is no room for hate.

My eyes are tired with writing in the glare, and Ah-lee has just appeared to relieve me. I shall not go on. I must think this out. But life will be easier

and more secure to-morrow,—better for the tribe! That is a good idea : the tribe. We shall be a tribe. How small, how lost we are ; how small, how lost is Maedchenbrueste floating in the great darkness of the sea and sky.

4

Nothing has happened—nothing worth recording. There has been not so much as the shadow of smoke on the horizon, not so much as a hint from all that vast, teeming world out there. Surely they have not forgotten us ? Surely we have not ceased for them ? They still have my shadow ; they will not let me die here, forgotten, unheeded.

I have no heart to write the drab story of our days. It does not matter—it is an hiatus in life which must soon come to an end. Nothing matters that happens on Maedchenbrueste. This is a sorrow to suffer and forget. It is all so trivial and unimportant. I see that my last entry was made after the talk the other evening with Moira Tremearne. I smile at it now. We learn right enough ! Sex was another thing for which there was no room on this island. It was a mere bogey created by our imagination—a toy which had occupied us once, but which ceased to interest us when we got up against the realities of existence. We meet, we go about our round of duties, but we are more than neutral : we are neuter. Wisdom !

I picked up another of the bottles this morning,

making eleven washed back on to the beach out of the thirty-two we sent out. I have little hope that the others will do any good. The sea is so wide. What chance has a bottle of being seen? Our messages may float about the oceans for centuries and never be noticed by the eyes of man, let alone picked up. I doubt if many of them got beyond the reef. That was more of Smyth's work. If he had left a decent raft here I should have been able to reach the entrance and set our messengers free there. But the raft was rotten. It fell to pieces and sank as soon as we launched it. Curse that man —oh, curse that man wherever he may be!

Even in trifling ways he makes us suffer. I brought nothing here save my trunk. What did he do with the rest of my luggage? Did he keep it aboard his schooner as he promised? If so, it is at the bottom of the sea. I came prepared for the simple life, and I am getting it. If I were saved to-morrow I should not have a suit to stand up in. I wish I had just one proper, civilised complete outfit of clothes. It would make a vast difference. I should treasure it and care for it, wearing it only on special occasions or when I needed a pick-me-up. Nobody could have played better into his hands and into the hands of Maedchenbrueste than I did in every way! To worry over that now serves no purpose.

The next time I write in this book it shall be to record our rescue. The rest is of no account.

5

I feel better to-day—less like a savage—for I am shaven. If I had grown a beard of my own free will it would have been all right, but to be unable to shave made one old and dirty. The discovery that we could manufacture soap was not the result of chance. Mrs. Quinlan and Ah-lee worked out the formula after many experiments. They use rancid coconut-oil as the basis—for some reason when the oil is fresh the result is not as good—and mix it with potash, literally the ashes from beneath the pot. The result is treated by boiling with coral lime. There would be scanty demand for our soap out in the world, but at least it lathers, and beggars cannot afford to be critical. It serves on skin toughened by exposure. Our efforts to keep clean without soap have been a trial. We are all rejoicing.

I never knew how fortunate one was to have soap. It was always by the wash-basin, or if it wasn't there was trouble. This filthy mess of ours seems more wonderful than the most elaborate invention of the twentieth century. The "breaking-down" of life to its primary elements is an odd business. We are becoming acquainted with the myriad details of civilisation by having to do without them. Our analysis is eye-opening. We miss most keenly the simple things. Gold would be useless to us, but soap——!

And the satisfaction of this soap goes deeper than

its material use. We have wrested something from Maedchenbrueste, created something. We have taken the oil, the ash and the coral and made a comfort and a necessity. A small achievement and yet I feel proud of it. It is a step in the right direction, and a deal wiser than standing day and night staring at the horizon where hope dwells.

CHAPTER VIII

I

FOR a long time the weather has been changeable. We get driving rain and blustering wind, thunderous calms when insects swarm in millions beyond belief, or spells of bright sunshine. It varies with every day—often several times in a day. Generally, grey has taken the place of blue as the dominant note. At times the sun is shrouded in misty darkness. It can be cold here. Sea and sky close in on us, forming a prison wall and roof in which there is no joint.

I have had neither time nor inclination for writing. The signal-fire needs constant attention in this season, and Ah-lee and I have been working on the hut to make it storm-proof. I meet the women in the course of our work, and we enjoy a truce, but I will not be driven up to that house. I value the peace and the seclusion of my home too much. It would be awful never to escape from them. The vegetable-garden has been occupying us, also. While there was a chance of getting away Ah-lee could keep it in good enough order, but now our lives depend upon its supplies, and nothing can be left undone which may make it more fruitful.

The hens have stopped laying—curse them! We

have built up the flock to nearly two hundred by care and self-denial. They lay small eggs, the flavour of which is not good—due to their diet, I suppose—and are stupid birds. We kill one occasionally, and have a feast, but only very occasionally. I regret our early extravagance. We did not appreciate the flesh to the full then. It is such a blessed escape from fish. When I dream of escape from Maedchen-brueste I dream, also, of escape from fish. I fancy I smell of fish, like a sea-bird. Catching and eating the things occupies half my life. Yet I thank God they are plentiful, for now the hens have stopped laying I perceive in what a plight we should be if the lagoon ceased to provide.

Turtles are scarce, and when we do get one, although it is a change, it tastes of fish in parts, while the eggs, which are like ping-pong balls, have the same all-pervading tang. The prawns are unsatisfying. I was fond of oysters once, but they have become the most nauseatingly primitive food on earth. What would I give for a steak or some veal, or a plate piled with thin slices of ham! And bread—or a doughy jam pudding! Yams and bread-fruit are poor substitutes for flour, though for a time after we found out how to prepare them properly they seemed bearable. The heart from the top of the palms is faintly suggestive of cauliflower, but it is not cauliflower, and coconut-milk I loathe.

So it is with everything. I would sell my soul to be walking on pavements with silk against my skin,

wearing a real suit and a stiff collar, and mingling with the swarms of humanity in the city's roar. I want the food I used to have—the square plain dishes and the spiced, fussed, decorated, sauced dainties that chefs make. I want all the things which are not on Maedchenbrueste, and none of the things which are.

One goes along for a time in a rut accepting this life with a kind of blank resignation, and then these rebellions sweep up. Anita Shaw is to blame for my mood to-day. She was helping me with the fowls—we were cleaning out their quarters under the house in an attempt to coax them into a better mood—and she began talking about home, and the people we knew, and the places we used to eat at, and the shows we used to see. Her chatter stirred the imagination and the memory which are better moribund. As well cry out for the moon as for the world—we are as far from both. It proves my wisdom in having only such dealings with the women as are essential and unavoidable. Whenever I depart from that rule there is trouble.

What a strange tribe we are—we savages of Maedchenbrueste. There never has been such a tribe before. We eat yams, and we talk of caviare ; we are barbarians who were once the darlings of New York and London. I often marvel when I look at those women. They are trying to deceive themselves by wearing more clothes. Their feminine instincts have warned them. At first it seemed that

they would drift into picturesque nakedness, but now they have made themselves strange attire, from sheets, blankets, table-linen, anything, clumsily sewn with thread unravelled from mosquito-netting and the like. But they have been handicapped by Maedchenbrueste's limitations, and have confined themselves to simple effects on Arab or Roman lines. They are very modest these days. Anita Shaw made a romantic, skimpy costume from plaited palm fronds which would have been a hit in a cabaret. Infinite work went into it, but I notice she has ceased to wear it, and favours a one-piece drapery made from a table-cloth.

My shorts and singlets hang together sufficiently to cover me. The cold does not trouble any of us. It is only the ingrained habit of centuries which drives us to this business of hiding our bodies, and we are the keener about it because we realise that even the habits of centuries may not withstand the attrition of Maedchenbrueste. I suppose that is why I still have Ah-lee shave me every third morning though the soap is disgusting and the operation painful. But, after all, even savages shave. It is queer, that—why should they trouble?

Ruth Dendy has recovered from the fish-poisoning. She was plucky about it, but she is the healthiest of us all. If Mrs. Quinlan had been the sufferer it would have gone badly with her. We should never have taken the risk, for the thing looked poisonous. These experiments in quest of a new taste must stop,

and we must confine ourselves to the varieties proved by experience. Moira Tremearne said we should have the head-waiter fired—no, sacked. Head-waiters?—I think of them as angels and ministers of grace.

I am tired to-night, for, of course, there has been a lot to do. But I must take up this writing again. It is a civilising influence. I do not think I have left out anything of importance. Nothing has changed my attitude towards the women, but I am no longer afraid of them. They are learning to be useful. It is well for us all I made that vow and have had the strength to keep it. I doubt if they remember I was Mark Antoine, and that is good. Better that I should smell of fish, like a bird of the sea.

I love the cold rain. Mrs. Quinlan says the monotony has taken all the edge off us. It would be a poor look-out for our sanity and comfort if we were as sharp as once we were. I am going to dig in the garden all day to-morrow and blunt my mind with the labour and the heavy smell of the earth.

2

It happened in the way things do here—abruptly, uncannily, fantastically.

The morning was blue-grey and hazy, with a wind which came from everywhere and nowhere in short, sharp blasts. The sun was blurred. I sat in front of the hut repairing a line which had been damaged by the coral. The house above had the appearance

of standing upon a volcano, for the plume of smoke from our signal-fire rose into the air, broken and dispersed at intervals by the wind. There had been rain in the night, and heavy drops still fell from the fronds, making neat round holes, like bullet marks, in the sand. The sea was leaden.

The razor cannot be kept down here in the hut on account of the dampness, and I awaited Ah-lee's return with it. He appeared from among the boles of the palms and began to walk towards me. I watched him, my fingers busy. Some ray of light caught his spectacles and made them glint. He came along as he came on any other morning—the jug in his right hand, his faded pyjamas flapping about him. But, suddenly, he did not come along any more. He stood still and yet lurched, the jug fell. My laggard mind followed all this a breath behind each movement. Ah-lee was face down upon the sand.

A coconut had fallen upon him, and killed him. I knew it at once—I had seen the palm nod to the blast, the nut fall and strike him—and yet I stood there with the line still in my fingers as if I observed a novel event which was startling but without significance. A coconut !—they were falling about us every day. No one had been killed before. He was some distance away. I had heard no sound. The string which held the puppet up had snapped. He could not have been killed by a coconut—not Ah-lee —not the Chinaman.

But now I ran along the beach in a frenzy of dread, the sand spurting from my toes. Another nut fell as I raced. I almost tripped over it. I thought: by God, that was close—it's a wonder any of us are alive—if I'd run a shade faster I'd have been dead, too. The fear of death was on me—death which struck so easily and swiftly and wildly. Who would have thought a coconut would fall on the particular inch of ground where a man stood? And yet they were dropping all the time, and any one might strike me down as Ah-lee had been stricken down. The top of my head tingled at the thought.

I came to him. He lay still, the nut beside him, the water from the jug oozing into the sand. His face was hidden, but his head was crooked, in an ungainly position and on a strange angle such as I had never seen a head before. There was blood on his neck, and the yellow, wrinkled skin was burst. I fell on my knees, calling his name, and turned him over. His features were more stony than ever now, and on his nose the spectacles sat, at a more ribald tilt, one glass broken. He was all crusted with the coral. I tore his coat open, and bared his yellow chest. There was no breath in it. I felt his heart; it was stone. Only his head moved, crookedly, like one of those dolls with the loose necks. He looked as old as a mummy, and seemed to have been dead as long, and yet he was not greatly changed. He had always been still and calm and immobile. He had been the perfect Chinese servant—and now he was dead.

Kneeling beside him I brushed the coral from his lips, and still unable to believe, felt his wrist. But, of course, he was dead. The tears came into my eyes, and ran hotly down my cheeks. I felt so sorry for him. He had worked so hard, been so willing and so capable, and a coconut had fallen from a palm and broken his neck. It was a poor kind of reward. A Chinese mother somewhere conceived him, bore him; he had grown old serving the foreign-devils, and now it was over for him.

I knelt there for a long time. There seemed to be nothing else to do. A sense of great loneliness came over me. I began to understand how much I had leant upon Ah-lee, and how important was the part he had played here on Maedchenbrueste. He had attended to all the essential details which were not worthy of my consideration; he had been a more capable and more industrious pair of hands working always for me; he had been the practical, imperturbable, unwearying machine in the scheme of life; he had been a slave who through storm and calm had bent to the oar—he had been Ah-lee. But he had gone, and there was a gap through which a chill wind blew.

His death was one of those shocks, which, being without parallel and never even contemplated, leave one stunned. I felt as if a limb had been lopped from me. And what did one do when Ah-lee was dead? I did not know, but presently I knew that he had to be buried—that I had to bury him.

I picked him up. He was light, like old bones. I held him with one hand, and brushed the sand and the greedy crabs from him with the other, and then I took him in my arms and we went away from that beach. The palms were plumes. The ground beneath my feet was sodden, and the grass lay flat. We paused at times, for the climb was steep, and sat side by side beneath the palms which had killed him.

And when we came out into the clearing before the house where he had worked so often, Moira Tremearne saw us and, with a cry, ran to the rail. The sound brought the others, alarmed, white-faced. They stood leaning down and out, staring at us.

"He's dead!" I told them.

Those lovely, clever Western women for whom he had toiled gazed in astonishment, as if death had raised him from his lowly estate to the dignity of being a man. But I knew he was a corpse, and that where two men had been before there was only one now. Tears came to my eyes again, and these were selfish tears.

"How——?" asked Lady Moira, and all their glances were fixed accusingly upon me as if I had killed him.

I told them about the coconut.

"This will make things harder for us," I said, out of my thoughts.

They nodded. Ann came from the signal-fire,

breathless. She stood stock-still by the corner of the house looking at her fellow-servant. She made no sound; she did not sob, although the others did. Yet she was always crying when we were funny. I think that little, bewildered Cockney girl has lived on past the mercy of tears. I was sorry for her as I was sorry for Ah-lee. They were involved in death because they served us, the satiated seekers after novelty.

"Poor Ah-lee!" said Anita Shaw, her voice more softly husky than ever.

And Mrs. Quinlan, with an effort: "We'll have to watch the fire as he did—see it doesn't go out!"

"That's sense!" I agreed.

"He was such a good cook!" Ruth Dendy sighed, not callously, but praising him.

We all praised him in jerky sentences. Death had lifted him out of bondage and had ennobled him. The fowls came from beneath the house, clucking, picking, rustling damp feathers. He had been very concerned about the fowls. I carried him up to the veranda, and laid him in the long cane chair in which he had never sat. They brought a strip of matting, and covered him. I left him with them.

The spade was at the back of the house where he had set it. I took it and went out past the signal-fire and on down the slope to a spot where the ground was soft. There I dug a grave, not as deep as some graves but deep enough. We buried him in the matting, for we could spare no other shroud.

The women stood in a group a dozen yards off, clustered together as if afraid. I shovelled the earth. He went away from our sight and out of the sunshine. Maedchenbrueste took him for ever.

The smell of the wet earth and the wood-smoke was in our nostrils, our eyes smarted. What burial service could we give him?—he was not of our creeds, and we knew not his. I smoothed the ground above him. Some monument—some roughly carved piece of wood—should mark the spot, but not a cross. He was so different from us, so much a stranger. But we mourned him. A sharp, cold blast of wind came. It brought a flurry of bright rain. The palms tossed. The shower grew heavier. The air was full of glimmering drops, falling like tears. We stood in the rain by Ah-lee's grave.

3

Since Ah-lee's death I have not had much leisure, but it is raining so hard this morning that nothing can be done in the open. Even the beacon has been put out, but I have just reassured myself that the parent fire in the kitchen burns well. This downpour will flood all the tanks. I had been rather worried about the water supply, for the passing showers were not fully replacing the depleted stocks. The fowls have started laying again. There were six eggs this morning.

I cut myself shaving to-day. I am clumsy with the razor, and the soap is beyond words. I have a

mind to grow a beard, and yet, for some inexplicable reason, the tyranny of shaving is hard to shake off. I feel as if it would be a distinct lapse into barbarism if I shirked it. I wish I were as useful with the strop as Ah-lee was. But this is only one of the thousand ways in which life has grown more difficult. There are so many little things which happened before as a matter of course, but which would not happen now unless we made them. I suppose the better served one is the less one appreciates the servant.

It was just as well I moved my bed up to the house before the rain really started. It was bad enough down in the hut during the showers, but now it would be impossible. I am writing on the veranda, and the storm beats in. The house is lost in water. The nearest palms are grey ghosts, and beyond them there is nothing save the downpour. Sky, sea and shore have been washed away. The mind is chilled by the thought of the unseen ocean stretching on for mile upon mile, sullen and cold beneath these thrashing torrents. The noise is loud as a cataract's, and has the same hypnotic power. I find myself staring fascinated at the silver sheets.

The house is given a soul by the force of the attacks to which it is subjected. I have never appreciated the admirable courage of a house, nor what a remarkable achievement it is. Herr von Bohn had this house put here upon the hill; men built it, and now, long years afterwards, it stands as a fortress, defying the storm—the one spot which is

dry and snug and comfortable in the whole of this world.

I dare not think what the rain may do to the vegetable-garden.

Ann proves the best cook. It is an accomplishment not looked for in a lady's maid, but it seems Ann is one of a family of seven. I was talking to her in the kitchen for a long time. My birth was humble enough, and I should have remembered, but, somehow, I had lost touch unwittingly with the ordinary people. So many of the great who know, rule and own the world dwell in ignorance of the fact that there could be such a thing. I was almost surprised when Ann talked about her home, and her parents—it was as if she had no right to such possessions. They live in some part of London, it seems, called Battersea. Her father, when he works, has a job in a boot factory. Her mother goes out washing, so cooking is nothing new to Ann. Her eldest brother is very clever, but consumptive. He makes good money as a rent collector. Ann supposes he is married by now. He was walking out with a young lady when she left London. But perhaps they have quarrelled. She hopes his cough is better. The doctor said the open-air life would be good for him.

She is, when you come to look at her, a queer, wistful little creature. She goggles as much as ever, she blushes as readily, but she is no longer obsessed by the knowledge that I am Mark Antoine. She did

not find it at all exciting to be talking with me in the kitchen. I am sure she would have preferred me to have been one of those big, red-faced London policemen, for, if I had been, there would have been an end to the prison of Maedchenbrueste. Once a kind of paralysis descended upon her whenever she came near me, but this morning while she chattered on in her high, nasal voice about Battersea and little Edward and the hardness of life for her mother because father was such a no-good, she bustled about the kitchen intent upon her work and her thoughts, using me only as a sympathetic listener to whom she could recite stories of another life dear but far.

It is odd about servants. There is Ann—Battersea is heaven to her, Maedchenbrueste is worse than hell. If she could have one wish at any price she would not hesitate: Battersea! Yet, although the sole reason for her presence here is that she served Moira Tremearne for a miserable pittance, she does not hate her mistress. She accepts the misfortune for which she is in no sense responsible. Her dumb patience is like that of an animal, and at the same time is noble in a way.

Ann has her limitations as a cook, however, for she lacks imagination and cannot originate anything. And, writing that, brings to my mind how necessity has driven us all to put our shoulders to the wheel which we must turn now if it is to turn. Ruth Dendy and Anita Shaw supervise, and, as it were, create our food. The Australian is accustomed to

camping makeshifts, and Anita Shaw has a capacity for disguising the fish of the sea and the fruits of the earth which renders them eatable. Moira Tremearne does the actual housework, and has evolved a prawn paste not unpalatable. Mrs. Quinlan is a kind of scientific investigator and experimenter. She has had tropical experience, and is a storehouse of odd scraps of knowledge. We should have been lost without her. She is always stumbling on something. She found out that a small yam, like a hairy potato, when skinned and fried in slices makes a biscuit substitute. Her efforts to discover an herb which might serve in lieu of tea seemed doomed to failure. But she is indefatigable.

So it goes. Our task is to keep alive, and it occupies all our energies. There is no end to the rain. A hen is cackling beneath the house.

4

After writing the foregoing I went into lunch with my brain more active than it had been for some time. One grows hardened by usage, and forgets the strangeness of one's lot. But coming straight into the room from the veranda and my journal I considered the motley company with interest.

It was quaint. I, at the head of the table with my five ladies about me, was a very sultan or sheik in outward appearance, but lacked all the qualities usually attributed to such potentates. The entry of the handsomest man caused no interest. They

nodded affably, but their eyes were quite impersonal. In the days before we ceased to act, and while this was still a farce their attitude had swayed between romantic passion and real hatred. I believe they could have murdered me once, because I was a nuisance. They would as soon think of killing me now as they would think of killing off the fowls. It would be uneconomic. I am useful: I catch fish, chop wood, dig the garden and tend the poultry. I am no longer the great lover in the flesh; I am a hard-working ally in the struggle for existence. In these days our appetites are of the stomach, our paramount desires are to survive and to escape from Maedchenbrueste, while if our hearts beat turbulently at moments it is because of the familiar deceit of a rising star or from the sudden thought that before the sun goes down we may be born again into the world.

But Maedchenbrueste punishes and corrects self-satisfaction with amazing promptness. I had no sooner complacently congratulated myself on the manner in which the stern realities have saved us from ourselves than an incident occurred which has filled me with trouble.

We began the meal in silence. We have discussed every subject until we are weary, and if we had spoken it would only have been to comment on the fact that it was still raining. As we were keeping the eggs for an omelet at dinner, we had oysters. They looked slimy and unappetising on such a cold,

damp day. I felt inclined to protest against them not being cooked, but did not because I knew there would be some reason. I cannot complain that the women neglect their duties. All the same, it was with repugnance that I put the first into my mouth, thinking that vinegar and pepper would have made it quite a different matter. Before I could swallow I felt something hard on my tongue. It made me splutter. I put my hand to my mouth and drew out a pearl with a feeling of immense surprise, like a conjurer whose trick has succeeded beyond all expectations. I was excited and well pleased with myself.

"I've got a pearl!" I announced, wiping it on my singlet.

"What?" They gaped at me.

"A pearl!" I showed it to them. It was a big pearl, too—bigger than any I had ever seen before, beautiful and perfect, full of deep, elusive light, and seeming to hold life, fire, a soul. We were like children. They rose from their chairs to look at it, craning their necks and uttering little cries of admiration and joy.

Anita Shaw clapped her hands gleefully.

"Oh, show me!" Ruth Dendy begged, reaching for it.

I did not give it to her. The primitive sense of possession was in me. It was my pearl; I had found it. My fingers closed upon it, and I shook my head.

"He thinks you're going to steal it!" Moira Tremearne remarked in fun. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were alight. There was a gust of laughter.

"No," I said, hastily, "it's not that. The thing's only a gew-gaw—it's not worth as much to us as the oyster I found it in—but it's something"—I searched my brain for what it was—"something new and unexpected, and I want it! It's mine!"

The fascination of that pearl was astonishing. I could feel it in my fingers, warm and living. Their desirous glances were fixed upon my hand as if they could penetrate the flesh.

"A lovely pearl!" Mrs. Quinlan sighed.

"I've never seen a finer," said Moira Tremearne, praising as one whose praise is of worth.

Ann sat silent, spellbound, but the rest of them were full of exclamations and opinions and admiration. They exchanged nods and glances, and looked at me enviously. We had all been so bored with the rain and the monotony that this was a great event.

"Show us!" urged Ruth Dendy.

I opened my fingers, but watched the admiring circle shrewdly lest they should seek to snatch it from me. The pearl's fire had lit antagonism in us, although we were submerged in the sea and the deluge, a million miles and as many centuries from the world where that pearl would have mattered. Its lure was irresistible. It appealed to me as symbolising all the charms and delicacies and refinements

which had gone out of our days. Nature had made it, but it was a bauble of the civilised globe whereon we had dwelt. It did not belong to Maedchenbrueste ; it belonged to Paris and the Opera on a gala night. We looked into it as if it were a crystal in which we saw the past—and the future of our dreams. The only sound was the hammering of the rain.

Their expressions alarmed me. Our safety had lain in the state of coma to which we had been reduced, but that pearl had restored us to life and had quickened emotions which were better dead. The find appeared suddenly as a misfortune. I tried to tell myself that it did not matter because the pearl was of no value to us, but that was an idle subterfuge. It did matter. It was a beautiful thing, and no one could look upon it without craving for it. There was magic in it—black magic.

Lady Moira's eyes met mine and she smiled in that way she had. I had not seen her smile so for time past reckoning.

" That's the kind of thing would happen to you Mark Antoine," she said.

I snatched the pearl away from their sight, and regarded her in anger. This echo was painful and disturbing. We had long ceased to remember that I was the kind of man to whom picturesque things happened. An imp had entered into her, and into us all. We were uneasy and agog. I held the pearl on my knees, sulkily, surlily.

"Don't be absurd," I said. "The thing's not worth a cent!" The old atmosphere had been restored. That was not what I had intended to say, nor what I should have said.

"Oh, yes it is," Mrs. Quinlan breathed. "Oh, yes—it's beautiful!"

"If it's not worth anything, Mark, you may as well give it to me!" Anita Shaw suggested, her eyes glowing like the pearl.

"No! No! Give it to me!" Ruth Dendy clamoured, jumping up and down in her eagerness.

They all besought that gift, right down to Ann for whom pearls were not, but who remained a woman. I heard them in silence, on the defensive, tightly clutching the smooth drop of beauty. They all wanted the pretty thing, but they should not have it. They were riled and impatient now, but I was stubborn.

"Come—Paris! Make your judgment!" said Lady Moira. She was herself again, she had recovered her form: she taunted me.

The judgment of Paris! It made me writhe. She had said it. Chance had provided me with a pretty token to bestow upon her whom I favoured. Jealousy and competition were rampant again in my unhappy tribe. And now, obviously, I could give it to none of them. I was dazed by the quickness with which the transformation had been worked and the scene sprung upon me.

"I won't give it away! I found it! I'm going to keep it!" I shouted at them, and the rain hammered on the roof.

"But it's no use to you!" urged Mrs. Quinlan.

"Nor to you!" I answered.

All the irritations, suppressions, hungers and cravings for some interest which were in us were laid bare. The outer shell of torpor was stripped away. It was the kind of thing that would happen to me. Why could not Chance have put that poison-laden oyster on any plate other than mine? If it had we should have been amused and pleased, and there would have been the end of it.

"I believe he's going to repeat, elaborate and reverse the Cleopatra extravagance," said Lady Moira. "He won't give it to his ladies, and so he'll drink it in vinegar to his own health, or something equally wicked."

"There's no vinegar!" I replied, reminding them.

They all laughed, trying to goad me into throwing the pearl at them. They were enjoying the thrill of this performance in a life where nothing happened. But I was aghast before the significance of our display and the realisation of the volcano on which we dwelt and which was so easily stirred into eruption. I swear that pearl had made them ripe for any mischief and anxious for mischief. It had aroused them—not by its value, for it had none to us, not by its beauty, for nothing is beautiful to us on Maedchenbrueste—but because it was something to be

desired and competed for, was a symbol even as I had been.

"No one shall have it," I said, firmly, and stood up. I had no appetite left, and my only desire was to close the scene before its effects worked further havoc in me and them. "Life is too serious for us to play the fool. Once that is begun again we may end anywhere. Forget about this, forget you've ever seen it, because you'll never see it again. I'm going to get rid of it. It's more dangerous than a bomb!"

"Oh, but you'll never have the heart to destroy it!" Mrs. Quinlan cooed.

There was no sense in further discussion. I left them, but I could not escape from the memory of their covetous eyes and mouths. And, having locked the door of my room, I sat down to decide what was to be done with this pearl. I thought, at first, that I should fling it back to our enemy, the sea, which sent it, but it lay glowing in my palm, and, savage that I am, its magic was too strong for me. I cannot destroy it; I cannot fling it away. It is before me on the table, and yet, having written in detail the peace-destroying story of its advent, I still cannot put it from me.

I shall hide it, and some day when one of them does something worthy of it I shall give it to her. As ruler of a kingdom I should have an order of merit to bestow. The pearl will suffice. Since other distinctions which they might like better are denied

to them they can have the pearl when and if they earn it. But there will be trouble—Oh, there will be trouble if it is ever awarded.

I feel that I would like to punish them for their foolishness about this pearl. I am of a mind to give it to Ann. That would make them squirm. And Ann is not the kind to whom pearls come as a usual thing. After all, what could they do? Life's been dull enough. I think I have earned a little amusement. Why should I merely provide it?

No, that is counsel of madness. I am as much the pearl's victim as they are, though to me it is even less than it is to them. It is no more than a disease of an oyster—a glimmery, shimmery thing like a huge pill with a kind of throbbing light inside it. I must not imperil our peace for such a trifle. I believe to throw it away would be easier in the world where it would be almost beyond price. Here life has so few interests, and this is a bewitching thing. A savage would worship it.

5

Easy for them to say that we must get away—that we cannot stay here for ever—but how can we get away? How? How? As if I do not hate Maedchenbrueste more than they ever did or ever will!—as if I stay here because I want to. It will drive me mad before it will drive them mad. My life in the world was more full of excitement than any of theirs, and I was a greater person. I miss

more by being here. I was Mark Antoine and they were only silly women, playing bridge, going to shows, chasing men. What are they missing compared with what I am missing?

Yes, easy to say that we must get away, but through the three days of rain I weighed the chances, and I know that if I leave this island it will only be to drift into death upon the sea. Life is bad enough here to drive a man to risk anything, but it remains life and is sweeter than death. At least while the land is beneath the feet, and one has food, water and shelter, there is hope. Any day we may be rescued. It is a gamble; the other is certain destruction.

For what kind of a raft or boat could I make though there were ten million times ten million palms upon the island and though all the furniture in the world offered its wood within this house? I am not a carpenter, a shipwright. They would not have come here if I were. I am Mark Antoine and that is why they came here. Well, for the same reason they must stay. I am not a sailor either. Suppose I constructed some absurd, crazy thing that floated, and put to sea on it, without compass, course or sea-lore, how far could I hope to get? Not beyond the reef! And there is a devil in this weather. It is mad weather. Half a gale of wind, then three days' storm of rain, and now this flat, thunderous calm, with everything dead and leaden and ominous, clouds black and mountainous filling

the sky, and Heaven alone knows what preparing behind them. Perhaps a hurricane.

Very easy to say: "Well, why don't you do something?" and to look clever. But I'll not be driven to suicide by tactics of that kind. I told them; I said "I'm not a coward! If my death could do anything to beat this Maedchenbrueste—to break the spell it's put upon us—I'd risk death! I'd meet death! But it can't! I'd die in torment out there on the sea, and you'd all be here—and happy to be rid of me!"

"How could *you* think that, Mark Antoine?" was Moira Tremearne's comment, her lips all crooked, and she and Anita Shaw exchanged their glances of unfriendly comradeship, and there sat that child, Ruth Dendy, miserable, eating her heart out for that precious Coogee beach she's always raving about. A beach!—by hell, if I ever get away from here I never want to see the sea again. It was a poor, hurried, hotch-potch of a Creation which only separated the land and the waters and let the sea remain.

I fled from them, for the hundredth time, for the thousandth time, and went out of the house. There was not a breath of breeze, and the weight of the great black clouds pressed down the air until it was almost too thick to breathe. No surf on the reef, no ruffle on the sea, no movement in the palms, nothing moving, nothing alive except me and the crabs. And as I walked along the shore I thought

of the way an animal pads up and down its cage, and the fools looking at it say: "It's a wonder it doesn't break the bars and get out!" Fools——!

A spur of coral thrust out from the beach, and the water was deep and still. I looked at it; it was like a shield of burnished steel. In it I saw myself, reflected there, living in the sea. From some corner of my mind came the memory of a night long and long ago when Ah-lee was alive—a night so long ago that I was alone on this island with him—and Mark Antoine had mocked me from a mirror made by men in Germany. Of course I see myself when I shave, but that is a matter of habit and without significance. This was different. I was a new Crusoe meeting my man Friday. He looked at me from the sea, and fish swam through him. He was not the same man. He was morose and grim, his eyes no longer flashed and challenged but gave me a grave scrutiny, he was dark, almost black and there was a stubble of beard on his gaunt cheeks. He seemed more like a man, less like a magnificent shadow, but he was no more my friend than that other had been, for he said: "I am you—I am deep in the sea—you are deep in the sea!" He shook his head mournfully at me, and he made me sad, even as the shadow in the mirror had made me angry. I turned away from him and from the foolish fancy begotten by this environment, but I thought it was strange that I, who am all vanity and self, should find Mark Antoine ever such sorry company.

Somewhere behind the clouds the sun was going down. Appropriately, because I always think of her as a creature of this short half-light, Mrs. Quinlan came along the beach. I was tempted to run from her as I had run from the others, but, somehow, the sight of myself in the sea had made me lonely. And so I walked towards her in a more friendly mood than I had ever met her before.

She came along quietly through the quiet, a small prim woman like a nun. She was watching the sand, unaware of my presence. I was glad of that. The sound of my footsteps startled her. She looked up, showing me her small, pointed face which brightened with a friendly gleam.

"You look glum," she said. "You must cheer up. It's the weather, you know—it is bad for the liver!"

I had to smile. She could have said nothing which would have pleased me better. The liver!—that was the real trouble. Her voice and presence were in keeping with the greying evening. I felt the need of companionship, someone to take me away from Mark Antoine drowned in the sea, and I fell into step by her side. I felt rather guilty, for I have been rude to her without much justification. Her motives have always been good, even though that only made her jangle more upon my nerves. But she bore no malice; she was quite ready now that I wished her to talk to me.

We walked slowly, chatting almost in undertones.

The gathering dark and the oppressive stillness were deadening like felt. In some way—I suppose it arose from me remembering that night so long ago—Ah-lee came up for discussion. It seems Mrs. Quinlan has been in China, and even knew some words of his dialect. She spent a lot of time with him, and found the man behind the Chinese mask. I had never realised this. It is strange what a number of things can be going on unnoticed even in such a tiny world as ours. He was born in Canton, it appears. She knew Canton. It must be an odd town. I should like to see it some day. We talked about all manner of things. She realises the impossibility of doing anything save wait, because she is not a woman of the cities and has felt the cruelty of the sea before. For all her appearance of gentle simplicity she has a shrewd, clever mind. She appreciated the significance of the pearl incident. But she had no ill to say of her sisters, for she admitted that it had affected her just as it did them. She, however, had the sense to recognise the fact.

" I'm glad you threw the horrible, beautiful thing back into the sea," she said. " You were very wise ! "

I was flattered and pleased. Admittedly, I have not thrown it away because I had not the heart to do so, but it is so safely hidden that the result is the same.

It was night by the time we reached the house. The other three were sitting on the veranda, having, of course, eaten before the darkness came.

They were still sulking over the scene of this afternoon, but I was not going to worry about them. The fish and sweet-potato pie was on the range in the kitchen and we took the meal out into the light of the signal-beacon, and had a kind of picnic. Ann was attending to the fire. The girl is more at home with Mrs. Quinlan than with the others. Mrs. Quinlan is motherly to her, and genuinely fond of her.

It was pleasant on the hill-top. The noise of the flames and their red glare were comforting and defied the forces of the black world. We did not talk much. The pie was rather dry, as it had been left on the range so long, but I had a good appetite.

Just after the others joined us the rain began again, coming down in a solid sheet, and we had to run for the house. I slept soundly, and awoke refreshed with the moods and incidents of the evening so clearly impressed on my brain that I have been tempted to write them at length. The storm has passed. I must get some oysters this morning, and this afternoon shall help in the garden. The damage there has not been as heavy as I feared.

To-morrow I must mark Ah-lee's grave. I feel ashamed that I have allowed the rush of living to make me neglect that duty.

CHAPTER IX *

I

MOIRA and I are now ten thousand points to the good. She plays as fine a game of bridge as anybody I have ever seen. Her bidding seems to be inspired, she never falters, never errs, and her luck is as notable as her skill. Her poise, her calm temperament and her insight into human nature all stand her in good stead. It is a pleasure to play with her. Both Mrs. Quinlan and Anita Shaw are rather better than average players, but she makes them look like two cents. I do not claim any credit for our success. It is all due to her. She is so confident and so assured, and she has cause to be. I never enjoyed bridge more. It makes me feel a contented

* At this stage Mark Antoine's notes become rather disjointed, and refer at length to matters which have no bearing on his story. He occupied himself considerably with the crustaceans, flora and other aspects of the natural life of Maedchenbrueste. I have submitted these to authorities and find that his observations—those of an untrained mind and eye—while interesting, contain nothing which is new to science and which may not be found in textbooks. I have therefore eliminated them, retaining only the entries which serve to throw light upon him and the adventure in which he was involved. In the early part there were also many accounts of bridge hands and results, which were of interest only to the actual players. As far as I can gather the records I have grouped in this chapter cover an extended period—probably about six months.

D. C.

glow just to see her fine hands pick up the cards, and hear her clear voice call her bids.

I do not think I have written at all since we started to play. It began when we found we had mastered the task of keeping alive sufficiently to have some leisure. Conversation held no charm for us—we wanted an occupation which would take our minds off our position. Of course, bridge was suggested, but we had no cards. Mrs. Quinlan, as usual, suggested a remedy which was simple enough, but had to be thought of: make a pack for ourselves. We did so, using the cardboard from a large box, and marking them with ink. It was so easy that we wondered we had not done it long ago, but, indeed, leisure had been scanty before that stage.

Ruth Dendy and Ann do not play, but occasionally we have poker in which the Australian joins, and rummy, in which all hands take a part. The others have a second pack and play a game on the lines of patience, which I do not understand. They seem to enjoy it. Bridge for me !—bridge with Moira as a partner. That is an exercise for the brain as well as a game. I feel that we are civilising Maedchenbrueste, when, with the day's work over, we wash and gather on the veranda. A cigarette and a highball are all that is needed to round it off, but one can't have everything.

We are so keen that we are playing by the light of the beacon. It hardly deserves the name of

"beacon" now. We have admitted, at last, that it signals into emptiness, and merely serves as a communal gathering-place in the evening. No!—that is only half true. We talk about rescue less, we think about rescue less, but deep in our hearts the hope remains, bright like a spark and painful like a spark. At times it flares up into a flame, and then we revolt against all this, and talk of the old days with shining eyes. But Maedchenbrueste goes on, and the flame dies down. It lies dormant for longer and longer periods. I suppose the spark dwindles.

Well, we are on Maedchenbrueste, and there is the end of it. Until we are picked up we must make the most of it. And that is what we are doing. We started with little save hatred and shame, but we are quite a flourishing community now. We have no troubles in particular, we dwell in peace and we play bridge. I sometimes wonder that we miss the world as we do. I doubt if we were ever more content out there. But, of course, we could not go on like this. It would pall, it would drive us mad in time.

The rain is pelting down again this morning. I suppose we shall play for the greater part of the day.

2

I like this part of the beach better than any other, though I do not know why, unless it is because history has been made here. I can see the very palm which killed Ah-lee, and to the right of me are the remains of the hut. The lightning left very little of it—no

more than a few charred stubs of wood. There is a certain consolation in considering the ruins of my former home, for my wisdom in leaving it is confirmed. If I had been stubborn and stayed on there in despite of wind and rain I might have had death in payment.

It is very strange about these crabs. I cannot understand how and where the young are reared. Presumably they lay eggs, but I never find them, and though there are small crabs here, they are not the young of the big crabs, or if they are they do not grow. There are two which live under this fallen palm. I know them because one has a broken claw, and the other a piece chipped from its shell. They are little fellows, but they never get any bigger. I intend to pick out a number which look like young ones and keep them in a box to see if they develop at all. Perhaps they grow very slowly. It may take a hundred years to perfect a crab. I am interested and mystified, but determined to read this riddle. I wish I could find some of their eggs.

Writing of eggs reminds me of another mystery which has been solved. I knew we were not getting all the eggs the hens were laying, but I could find no explanation of the shortage until yesterday. Then, by a most fortunate chance, I caught the thief red-handed. He was a lizard, though at first I thought he was a small crocodile, for he was five feet long. I broke his back with the spade. He had an egg in his mouth. How he had escaped being seen before

I cannot imagine. I believed I knew every living thing on Maedchenbrueste.

When I pulled him out from beneath the house and called the others to see him, Ruth Dendy said he was an iguana—a big lizard they used to have in Australia. Of course, she was not sure that he was the same, but he looked like it. The discovery of this queer enemy in our midst was naturally exciting, and we stood about talking it over for some time. Ruth Dendy said that the "black-fellows" in Australia baked iguanas in the embers and ate them. We would not believe her at first, but Mrs. Quinlan had eaten snake at a native feast in Fiji, and said it was quite good if rather peculiar.

"Let's eat him!" Moira Tremearne suggested. She was quite keen. I have never seen anyone as eager as she in quest of novelty. She finds it even here; life will never be dull to her.

We laughed at the proposal at first, but there is something contagious about her interest in anything new, and after some debate we decided to cook it, just as an experiment. If we did not like it there would be no need to eat it. He had had our eggs, and if he made a dish they would not have been wasted.

I cleaned him, and we cooked him in the ashes, skinning him afterwards. Lunch was the liveliest meal we have had for many a day. We were like children at a birthday party—a party to which they had no right. We had a feeling we were doing some-

thing unusual and rather daring. But, although we were tired enough of our ordinary fare to appreciate anything, the iguana was not a success. The flesh was like jelly, and we could only eat the outside because we had not cooked it enough. Its flavour was rather like salt chicken which had been kept near fish.

Ann was the only one who would not have any.

"It looks as if it'd taste like eating a baby!" she said.

We laughed. It was so typical of her. Battersea might not be expected to encourage a delicate appetite, but Ann is not adventurous. I believe she would eat rotten beef in preference to any dainty with which she was not familiar.

"It takes a really sound conservative to be radical and progressive," Moira Tremearne commented, and that summed it up.

We suffered no ill-effects, and it was well worth doing for the excitement we got out of it.

The weather is improving. It is still and warm to-day, but the air is fresh. The smoke from the beacon rises straight and thin into the blue. We keep it burning from force of habit. No ships are left on the sea, only Maedchenbrueste, the unsinkable, the unmoving. Looking out from here the ocean swells up into the sky, so that the horizon is higher than it used to be and we are lower down and more lost.

But one can grow accustomed to anything. I suppose the dead grow accustomed to being dead.

We are happy enough here in a dull kind of way, just as the crabs are.

3

When the nights are dark my sleep is heavy and dreamless. We roost when the hens roost, and rise at cock-crow. The night was once brighter than the day with pleasure and light, but our only answer to it here is the beacon. The moon at the full offers escape from the arbitrary rule of the sun, however, and for this reason I was restless and wakeful to-night. Presently I rose, put on my coconut-fibre sandals and stole out of the silent house, for those who could sleep had earned their sleep.

The moon was round and very close to the earth, so bright and the air so warm that it seemed a gentler sun shone. The globe of sea and sky was silver-blue, and Maedchenbrueste's myriad palms were white and still, so that the island had the appearance of having been covered by a fall of snow. I stayed on the veranda for a while, but the desire to prowl was on me, the desire to make use of these hours of light. I went down the steps and down the path to the beach. It was like being on the moon. The house above was dead. The beacon was dimmed, as a candle is dimmed at dawn.

Coming to the swimming-place I was tempted to go out to the platform for fishing I have built upon its outer wall. It was hot upon the beach ; there were many insects, and the constant activity of the

crabs was tiresome. They moved in legions everywhere. They are getting on my nerves. Loneliness must be a terrible thing. I can imagine a man all alone in a place like this being driven mad by them and their puzzles, and then, no doubt, he would die and be eaten by the swarming hosts. They must breed, those crabs, but I never find any of their eggs or any young ones. The three I have in the box—one died and the others ate him—do not grow at all.

There were no crabs out on the platform. It was clean and cool and quiet out there, like floating in the sky. The air was all moonlight, and so was the sea. There was another moon in the lagoon. The wood beneath me was the only solid thing left in the world. All the rest had been melted into silvery bright mist. I sat for a time, my legs hanging down, not doing anything, only breathing, as a fish lies in the water. But I felt sad, eaten up by sadness, so that I could have cried aloud to the moon.

Anita Shaw startled me, appearing so suddenly, like a ghost. She was wearing something white wrapped about her, and the moon touched her as it touched the sea and she melted. She did not say anything, but came and sat beside me. She seemed transfigured and bewitched ; she was beautiful. The moonlight was on her arms and shoulders and breasts ; it was in her eyes, making them bright as if with tears ; it was in her hair.

" Why, Anita, what are you doing here ? " I asked.

She turned her face to me, and it was secretive and calm.

"There's no use staying up by the fire," she said, whispering. "It's light is lost in all this light. I saw you come down here, and I was lonely, so I followed you. Don't send me away!"

"Why should I send you away?" I asked, for she was like a sad, lovely thought.

She made no answer, but looked out to the sea, and I looked at her, idly with a blank, soothed mind. It was good to be away from the crabs and Maedchenbrueste. I wanted to talk to her, but the talk of our world was not to be spoken out there. Nor the talk of the other world either. And I thought: she's forgotten me! She's thinking of somebody back there at home! That made me sad.

She looked at me suddenly and said: "Savages sing when the moon's full—they sing and dance!"

"That's so!" I said.

"It's because the moon makes them unhappy, and they want to forget!" she told me, and she began to sing, very quietly, to herself, in her sweet, husky voice. It was a nigger spiritual about God's children and shoes. The words came very softly from her soft lips. I watched her lips, and her white face, raised up to the moon. And when she had sung that song she sang another. But I do not know what she sang. The small, bright words went away through the moonlight and into the sea and into my head. It was like a dream, floating in the sky with her sing-

ing—all white as an angel with the halo of her hair about her face.

I sat watching her with my mouth open, and I perceived that my mind and senses have been rusted and atrophied by the monotony of this life, because I found nothing to say to her and felt that sensation of being deprived of the power of action which one has in dreams. A crab would not have been as appreciative as I, but I was as incapable of demonstrating my feelings as any crab, and I was glad of this, because, for some reason, I was afraid.

She ceased to sing, and we sat quiet in the night, which was like the heart of a pearl. But all at once she shivered and stood up. I stood up, also, as one does in dreams, bound by invisible chains. The sheet fell back from her shoulders. She was like the moon. She came a step closer, but lightly and cautiously as if I might run away, as if I were something wild and easily scared.

"I am going now; it is your turn at the fire," she said, and then, looking into my eyes: "Remember to-night, Mark! Remember me in the moonlight; remember that I sat with you and sang, and that I went away quietly, unasked, like this!"

And while I stood at a loss and puzzling over her words with my head full of the plaintive singing, she turned and went from me, passing swiftly along the wall like a ghost, melting into the moonlight. I was alarmed by my own numbness, by my inability to act or think. But I remembered that which she had

told me to remember, and her eyes which were deep as the sea.

I have written it all down here by the fire, because I do not wish to forget. There is such a lot to do in the morning. The moon is going away. I am grateful for that, because then I shall be able to think more clearly. Somehow I am frightened about what I have written. It seems a queer happening, but I swear I am sane. I am so sane that I shall not give her the pearl, for, if I did, it would cause trouble here on Maedchenbrueste, and that cannot be allowed. We must not start fighting like the crabs on the beach.

4

While my hands are still stained with the soil I must write this down, for it is the most important thing which has happened since we have been on Maedchenbrueste. We found them—I found them —in an old rotten box beneath the house. The rain and damp had started them sprouting, they were green with young life, and their tender sturdy roots reached out for the warm brown earth. I did not know what they were, but when I called the others Ruth recognised them at once as grains of wheat! The women did not understand the reason for my excitement, but I explained to them. There was flour growing in that box, dough, bread—the very thing we lacked, the staff of life!

We counted them, gloating the while. There

were forty-five grains in that treasure chest. The greedy fowls were all about, pecking and scratching. I was so keen to get the spade and start the sowing that I nearly forgot to close the lid again. I shudder to think what might have happened—we might have come back to find them all gone, all swallowed by those hungry birds.

We cleared a big corner, and planted the grains with infinite care. We have built about them a kind of wooden cage that no harm may come to them. Now there is no more to be done than to tend them and pray they may thrive. But something real has been accomplished, and something which should be of permanent value. We have struck a blow at the barbarism of our existence.

Assuming that they prosper—and everything grows in this wonderful soil—we shall have many times forty-five to plant next time, and the next time many more again, and perhaps, after then a real crop, some of which we shall grind and make into flour. It is going to take a long time, but, in some fashion that is an advantage. We have gained a hope for the future. We may never be saved, but where before, with that chance eliminated, we had nothing to look forward to, we shall now know that with the passing of time we are making the earth more fruitful that the comfort of our lives may be increased.

This is a real victory. No wheat has ever grown in this world before, but we, the pioneers, shall grow

it. Some day a field will flourish here, and we shall bring the harvest home, and that will be a scene the palms have never looked upon and which beneath these blue, wide skies will be a miracle.

I am glad I made the find. If one of the women had done so the others would all have been jealous. They are, however, generous where I am concerned. I believe nothing pleases them better than when I win at bridge. I am a great man here on Maedchenbrueste; they would be lost without me, and I without them should be mad.

5

Watching the crabs has aroused me to the thought of the omnipresence, tenacity and persistence of life, the spark, the living thing. Here is Maedchenbrueste, a pin-point thrust out of the depths of the sea, liable at any moment to be engulfed by the sea again, and yet it swarms with life which is always creating more life. The crabs and the insects and the lizards are all breeding, begetting more of their kind, making more use of this spot of earth. The nut falls from the palm and becomes a palm in turn; the wheat we have planted has in it the strength to create wheat to cover the twin breasts of this isle. Death and decay may mow down crab and insect and lizard, wheat and palm, but they persist and rise triumphant over death, by the life they have given. The crab before me may die to-day, but it is immortal. A score, a hundred, a thousand crabs

which would never have been had it not lived give it immortality.

The wheat is not thriving very well. But I am convinced it will grow. It stirred to life in the darkness of the box, and the warm rain and the warm sun shall quicken life which is an echo of that life when the grains we planted are dust inseparable from the soil, and when we are dust.

6

This shows the value of studying the creatures which live here. I believe we are only beginning to exploit the possibilities of Maedchenbrueste. I saw the foul things yesterday for the first time when I was shrimping. They were lying on the bottom, like great slugs a foot in length. I am keen these days. I picked one up. It was a squabby, mottled brown mass oozing slime, and I wondered to what purpose it could have been created.

Mrs. Quinlan enlightened me, when I mentioned them to her while she was cutting my hair this morning. They were bêche-de-mer, and she had eaten soup prepared from them in China. She made us feel hungry with her description of the soup: it was gelatinous and rich. I believe, as a matter of fact, I tasted it once in San Francisco. But Mrs. Quinlan is a wonderful woman. Her mind is full of knowledge; she seems to have gone about the world picking up scraps of information and storing them away. She knew that the sea-slugs had to be

boiled and then smoked. It is going to be a difficult process, but we shall master it. Ruth and I are going out after lunch to gather some.

My hand and arm were down in the water, looking oddly cut off from me in the clear depths—as if they belonged to someone else. The hand was just about to close on a big slug which lay upon the crinkled sand in a garden of coral and weed. A grey-blue band darted out from that weed, struck at the hand, and vanished like the shadow of a ripple.

I felt a tiny, tingling pain, and knew what had happened, but through an eternity I could not move, for death held me by the wrist. And then I straightened up, with difficulty, heavily.

"Ruth!" I called.

She was a few paces away, and, seeing my face, came floundering through the water, with a cry on her lips.

"Sea-snake's bitten me!" I said, numbly.

I held out my arm to her, with a strange feeling of grievance rather than panic. There were twin beads of blood upon it. My mind was not working. It had all happened so suddenly, and sky and sea were so calmly blue and the sun so warm that the thought of death running through my veins stunned me like a blow. But she was not stunned.

"May be deadly poison," she said. "This will hurt, but it must be done!"

While she spoke she whipped the knife from my

belt, seized my hand, and before I could cry out, before I realised what she was about, was hacking at my flesh, digging and thrusting round those points of red. The blood spurted up. It was like a dreadful nightmare, standing there above the waist in water with that child, for she looked no more, probing my arm with terrified, blind energy. It hurt, but I was deadened by the fear of death, stealing unseen beneath my skin.

I watched her, and watched the blood, thinking: it's a wonder she doesn't faint. The blood was pouring out, dropping into the sea. I thought: This is not happening; I shall wake up.

"The basket—quick!" she said.

The basket was on my back, with the slugs in it. I let her tear it from my shoulder. It splashed into the water. I held out my arm, and the blood ran out of me. She cut the cord from the basket, snatched my arm again, and wound the cord round it just above the wound. Then she slipped the haft of the knife into the cord and turned it, tightening the band until the flesh bulged on either side and I groaned in pain. The blood spouted up in a tiny fountain. I saw her face. It was white, like a wax mask; there was no expression in it. She was completely absorbed in her task, while I was a marvelling spectator.

Then she bent her head, swiftly, and holding my arm in both her hands, put her lips to that awful poison cup. I wanted to stop her; I felt that it

would be better to die, but it is hard to be heroic with death in your veins. I could only gasp. I was sick in the stomach, and my head was spinning. She spat it out. We were there in the blue water beneath the blue sky. She did not faint. She went on with her task. She took the risk of death ; I was a snake striking at her life.

But the pain and the shock and the threat and the poison worked in me. I was grateful, wildly grateful, but I could not save her or thank her. I could not even save myself. I seemed to be drifting, yet anchored to a great bulging arm and a great bulging hand. I saw her, mazily, a long way off, looking at the wound. And then she nodded, and swiftly dropped down to the sea.

I feared she had fainted and knew I had to save her, but her head reappeared, and I understood. She had been washing the poison from her poor young lips. She put her arm about me, and her wet body pressed against me. My arm went round her shoulder—my good arm. The firm coolness of her skin made me feel happy, for I was in a world where there was nothing cool or firm. We stumbled to the beach. I wanted to thank her and to lie down for a while and rest, but she would not let me.

Her voice said, insistently, urgently : " You mustn't let go ! You mustn't sleep ! If you sleep you'll never wake ! "

And I knew that would not do at all.

" No," I said, " no—I must stay here with you ! "

She marched me along the beach, forcing my legs to walk after I had lost the power to drive them further. She talked to me all the time, imploring me to live, praying to me to live, calling me by name. And I answered her as best as I could and worshipped her. I cannot put it all down here. I was sick. It was a torment of I know not how long. She brought me to the house, and they gathered about me like blessed angels. They knew what to do, but they lacked all the things for which they cried out. I heard them demanding permanganate and whisky and bandages, but there were none of these things, yet they saved me. They loosened the ligature, and applied it again, and when they could keep that on no longer they bandaged the arm downwards from the heart with strips of cloth. They took it in turns to shake me and march me about, up and down the veranda, about the garden, beating me with their hands when I was driven to seek the sleep which seemed so sweet but which I feared with all the terror of the living thing threatened by death.

But to have gone through it is sufficient. I have only written this that I may have some record of what she did—that child, Ruth. I am better now. The treatment was applied in time, the wound will heal and I shall soon make up the blood I have lost, for I am healthy and strong. She shall have the pearl. I am sorry if the others feel slighted, but they must realise she saved my life, and not by spectacular bravery, which is easy, but by doing a

ghastly task unflinchingly, by setting her young mouth to a cup of death.

7

I had thought it all out while I was recovering, and now, being well again, the time had come for action. Ruth had to be thanked and rewarded, but not in cowardly secrecy, openly, before our little tribe. It was the hottest hour of the afternoon, and they would be gathered on the veranda for brief rest before returning to their tasks. I took the pearl from its hiding-place beneath the boards, and was glad it was so beautiful. I went out to them, holding it in my closed hand.

The excitement of the moment sharpened my senses, which have been worn smooth, as a pebble is worn by the waves. One grows so accustomed to this life that the mind accepts it without question and as a matter of course. But it is odd, nevertheless. The passage door gave on to a stage which, in the main, was always set with the same scenery. The same sea, the same sky, the same palms, the same five figures sitting in the same chairs—all changed no doubt in a thousand details, all changing with the passing of each day—even the chairs changing—but in essentials the same. The afternoon into which I stepped might have been that on which the schooner was destroyed.

But the women were not talking now, were not quarrelling, they were resting because they had been

working hard and had more work to do. We talk a great deal less than we did once. Their lips were silent when I stepped out, although their eyes greeted me. I looked at them, as if we had not met for a long time.

I have written that they were the same—but that is not right. They had changed beyond recognition. I was taken back into the past, and remembered them as they had been—each different from each, each a type. They had ceased to be different ; they were all alike to a degree as are members of the same family. They had been worn smooth, like me—the embellishments and the imprints of the other world rubbed from them, leaving them plain women, brown, determined to keep alive and working that they might have food. Our life was so simple that there was no room, no leisure and no scope for all the complex facets of civilised humanity.

All this comes to me as I write, but it was not clear at that instant, for I have not been thinking about these things much, and the mind needs practice to be proficient just as the hands of a pianist need it.

"I'm fit for work again," I told them, standing in the doorway. "I owe my life to you, Ruth!"

I felt embarrassed and the pearl seemed to burn my palm. Interest awakened in their faces, and they stirred. A blush, like one of Ann's, appeared in Ruth's cheeks, and she caressed her left ankle with

her right foot, like a child. She gave me one bright, shining glance and then looked down. But my gratitude was rewarded.

"It was nothing," she said. "Lucky I was there."

"Yes—lucky!" I agreed, and from my heart. "I can't express my thanks, because this place makes one tongue-tied, but I want you to know I appreciate the debt!"

There was no need for me to go on with this laboured speech. The thing to do was to give her the pearl, and let that speak for me. I knew it would be eloquent, for it was the most beautiful thing on Maedchenbrueste, where life was stark. But before speaking, I looked at the others, and suddenly my fingers closed more tightly. There was silence; all, save Ruth, watched me. They were alarmed, envious; they implored me to remember that they would have done as much as readily if they had had the chance. I had never recognised the fact at all, but it was a fact. It was written in their eyes.

My glance returned to Ruth. She raised her head. The blush had drained away, and where pleasure had been there was now a frightened look.

"No!—I did nothing!" she said, abruptly, in a cry.

She thrust out her hands as if warding off a blow. Blind instinct warned her of peril, and her words informed me of my error. It would have been a

poor acknowledgment of my debt to have given her the pearl—the apple of discord. Cruel to her—cruel to them all! It would have been a horrible blunder. But I had been saved from it. The tension went out of me, and out of the air. I held the pearl less closely, but with more cunning.

"Well, we'll say no more about it because words are inadequate," I remarked, more at ease. "But I thank you—all!"

They broke into a chorus of polite murmurs.

"We need a man about the place, you know," Moira remarked, lightly but deftly.

"And what about the bêche-de-mer—is it worth risking?" asked Mrs. Quinlan.

The talk turned to this important topic. We decided that the risk was negligible if we took more care. Ah-lee was killed by a coconut, but although they are falling about us all the time we are still alive. It was his fate to be killed like that; it is not ours. If I am to die by the bite of a water-snake so I shall die, but not otherwise. We know these things. We have learned them in the course of our trade of keeping alive.

I left them presently and went down to the beach. There I threw the pearl far out into the lagoon. It looked worthless—like a pebble—as it sailed through the air, plopped back into the sea, and vanished. My heart was heavy, however, for it was a lovely thing and it would have delighted any woman—but not on Maedchenbrueste.

8

Mrs. Quinlan is down with malaria again. We can do nothing save pile all the available coverings upon her, and sweat the fever out. She should have whisky and quinine, but these luxuries are not. Our comparative immunity from malaria is a tribute to the healthy life we lead. In Mrs. Quinlan's case the trouble is a recurrence, for she contracted it in Africa, but none of the rest of us has suffered to any extent.

Whisky—I wish we had some whisky. I should like a whisky now and a cigar. I should like a long whisky and iced soda. Like?—I would give one of my ears to be sitting in a deep club chair, with some of the crowd about yarning, a Corona between my lips and a highball on the table. How soothing it would be, how peaceful. I should blow the smoke up and watch the blue cloud drifting, while Amb. and old Peters waged their wordy war, and then I'd take a pull at the highball, and it would be good and harsh on the palate, not sickly sweet like coconut milk, or tart like a lime drink, or soddening like water. It would brace me up, and the tobacco would lull my nerves, and I should be a balanced, ordinary man.

But here—who can be normal here? We are infinitely worse off than savages. They have not our appetites developed through centuries, and yet they have their betel-nut and their palm toddy. I wonder

if we could ferment a decent drink from the palm—any kind of a drink which *was* a drink. It might be worth trying. The bêche-de-mer soup is not bad. Perhaps we could make a drink—something which would satisfy the demands of the nerves for a stimulant and a sedative. I must talk it over with Mrs. Quinlan when she is better. We must get more things into this world. It is too empty for people who have lived as we have lived. It seems to be all sky and sea. I wish we could make machinery, harness steam, set wheels roaring and spinning ; I wish we could rise superior to this blank nothingness of Maedchenbrueste. Why, the crabs are using their lives to better advantage.

For us the days are simply drifting by, and all we have to show for them is that we are still alive. But this is life drifting by—my life—I grow older—I shall never be able to regain these days which should have been crowded with effort, achievement and pleasure, but are no more than a single day in which one has gathered food and eaten it, and slept. It is torment. I am Mark Antoine—the only Mark Antoine—with America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia at my feet, whose shadow is still charming every continent, and yet I am on Maedchenbrueste as helpless as a corpse and as wretched as the damned.

These women are very wise. I believe they knew I had kept the pearl, that I was going to give it to Ruth, and that I thought better of it and threw it back to the sea. Their intuition in these things is

impressive and has to be recognised. We are happier together than before.

9

The fact is I am sick of bridge—heartily and completely sick of it. I never want to touch another card as long as I live. Nothing could be so fatuous as playing the same game with the same people in the same setting for day after day, month after month, year after year. And we are under compulsion which makes it doubly unendurable. It is a mere mechanical method of killing time. And what is the use of gambling without money? We have tried using small shells as tokens, but there is no sense in playing for tokens. If there is any game with cards we have not tried I should be surprised to discover it.

Mrs. Quinlan's chess and draughts boards are no better. They were all right at first, but all the glamour wears off these things in time, and there is always the haunting annoyance that one is only doing them because there is nothing better to do. We are like children on a wet Sunday. We want to go out—we do not want to do anything in the house—but there are no doors to the house of Maedchenbrueste.

I had some excitement yesterday, and words cannot tell how I enjoyed it. A big white gull has been in the habit of picking up trifles along the beach. It was a wary and wise old bird, but I got

it this morning after many attempts—stalked it from among the palms, and hit it with a lump of coral. It tried to make for the water, but I winged it again with another piece, and was on it before it could recover. I wrung its neck, and we had it for lunch to-day. The meat was coarse and black, and it was all I could do to eat it, for the fish flavour was very high. The others left theirs. I was not going to do that, however, after all the trouble I had been to in bagging it. I must keep an eye out for any more that come along. They take some getting, just with a lump of coral. I wish there were rabbits or something of that kind about. They would be a nice addition to the menu, and I believe I am in such good training now that I could almost run a rabbit down. It would be good fun, anyway.

CHAPTER X

I

MOIRA started it. She is good at starting things: she started the whole of this mad business of Maedchenbrueste. It came as a surprise, and yet it was natural, inevitable. I should have been aware of it long ago, if this place had not turned me into a simpleton—a yokel, straw in mouth, stolidly meditating upon crawling creatures, deadened by monotony and manual labour, my active hours completely occupied with gathering food and eating it. I have had to work to eat, eat to work; work to sleep, sleep to work—there was no room for anything else.

And yet, though I attribute the awakening to her, it is due in the first place—as all things are—to circumstance. We were getting on our feet, succeeding, conquering the difficulties of keeping alive, and gradually the mind was freed from its complete bondage to the stomach. This is the result! If Ah-lee had lived or if the stores had held out it would have happened long ago. But my wits are still slow—they move on the wooden wheels of an ox-waggon rather than the ball-bearings of civilisation—and I know not what to think, nor what I feel, nor what to do. For this reason I write the two

incidents as they happened in the hope that it will clarify and stabilise my brain which is full of the rains and sunshine, the storms and calms of Maedchenbrueste.

2

The night was blacker than the pit. Maedchenbrueste was pressed between two heavy covers, formed by the flat sea and the tremendous clouds. The stars and the infinite sky were shut out. No breath of breeze moved in the congested strip of air, and the shrill insect chorus was the only sound. The skin felt arid, and the eyes ached with the density of the darkness. But at intervals, abruptly, a sheet of lightning flooded the world with cold, intense brilliance. The sullen sea, the sullen clouds and the dead army of the palms were surprised and revealed while the grunts of the thunder rose to a roar. The thunder went rumbling and muttering away. The night closing up again with a snap left the senses stunned. It was like a second of resurrection, and then the tomb again.

Fatigue could not bring sleep on such a night. Abandoning the hope, I had escaped from the house on which the roof seemed to have been forced down even as the roof of heaven. There would be no health and no peace until the clouds were delivered, but although the whole universe laboured it did not rain.

The beacon repelled with its glare. I went on into the night, fumbling like a blind man, and hag-

ridden by the agony of nature. A swarm of insects hung about me. Some were sparks, and sparks were in the grass, also, but otherwise I might have been in the bowels of the earth. It was hot; too hot for the pores to sweat. I followed the path by instinct. Palms were all about me, but only when the lightning set them there. Presently I was on the beach, with the water by my side, like lava, glowing as it touched the sand. Up on the height the fire marked where sky and isle were welded into one.

I walked slowly and heavily with no purpose save that of enduring until the rain came. The coral crunched beneath my feet, and a crab, bluely luminous, sideling away set me wondering how many lives this evening stroll of mine would cost among those puzzling peoples of the shore. The train of thought was interrupted by a cool sound of splashing. I was startled, for the water was so still and heavy that the noise conjured up visions of strange monsters rising from the depths to sport in secret. I quickened my steps. There was a flurry of creamy radiance, white and glistening like quartz, but though it was quite close I could make nothing of it.

The lightning came, brighter than any sun. A picture in clear white and deep black filled the void.

Moira Tremearne stood thigh-deep in the water, ivory rising from ebony. I saw her for that fraction of time with incredible vividness, dazzling, gleaming, wet. Every detail was impressed on my eyes, etched on them by that fierce light. I saw the sur-

prise dawning in her face, her lips parting, her eyes widening, the coils of her hair neat about her head as if cut by a chisel. She stood very erect, her head flung back a little, her arms crossing whitely over her white breasts. The blaze intensified, burning up the sea and leaving Moira Tremearne in a great glory.

And, then, the night again, the darkness between us like a wall, the darkness blinding the eyes and rushing into the brain while thunder shook the unseen sky. There was no time for thought, but through me sang, from nowhere, the syllables, Aphrodite! though I knew not what they meant. The thunder ceased, the darkness grew familiar, and another breath was drawn. Life went on.

"Moira, you must come out of that," I cried, my tongue speaking a thought of which I was unaware. "The snakes—they'll get you!"

The warning surprised me by its sense.

She answered from out the mist she had become: "I must get cool! And what would it matter?—would you care?"

"My God, I would!" I swore, my flesh creeping at the thought.

We stood in silence, she in the sea, I on the shore. The torpor which had held me for time past reckoning had gone; my blood ran turbulently like a stream thawed after a hard winter. I forgot and remembered; I was drunk and thirsted. As I write I know my fate was in her hands for that moment,

but she who had no mercy once—who would have bartered her soul for such a thrill—gave me my chance. She waited for a while, and then she asked : " Mark, am I to come out ? " softly and gravely.

The respite and the question saved me. I saw the trap set for us. Whatever may happen now I shall not mourn a folly done on impulse nor wreck our craft upon a reef of sudden passion.

" No ! No ! No ! " I told her. " No !—I'm going away. Moira !—it mustn't happen like this. This isn't as simple as it seems. It means too much to you, to me, to all of us here on this place now ! Stay there, Moira—we can't !—mustn't !—not like this ! I'm a man just awakened—I can't think—but I know we've got to look out ! No ! "

I said no more and waited for no answer. I ran through the blackness, fleeing panic-stricken from her and from myself, fleeing from the force which has covered the whole world—even Maedchen-brueste—with life. But I did not understand. I wanted to go back to her, desired her as I had never desired anything before—my emotions intensified by the long hibernation, and by the demoniacal night—and I could not erase her picture from my mind, but I knew that I must not go back. The simplicity of our days allowed no side-issues to cloud the main point. The whole social system of our community had been shaken, and if I went back to Moira there in the sea it would come toppling down about our heads. I had come to accept that system as natural

and inevitable, but now that its weakness was discovered I saw it as an accomplishment, as a delicate structure wisely erected to meet the need imposed on us by Fate, as something not to be lightly set aside because without it our tribe would fall to pieces.

I ceased to run ; I walked along the still beach. It struck me as strange that this scene should have had such a violent and revolutionary effect. I had seen them all at one time or another clad in few clothes or none at all. It has been natural. Nakedness is only an excitement for the very young. I had not been young even when I came to Maedchenbrueste. The cause was deeper than that. There was a change in me, and—with the absorbing details of existence adjusted—I was the victim of subtler things.

Writing of it in the bright sunlight I seem to be looking back at another man in a mad bewildering world of blazing light and pitchy darkness. I see him stumbling along the empty beach, like one outcast and wounded ; he seems pitiful and small and lost—no bigger and no more powerful than a crab in the immensity of the night. The sight of him there, like that, gives me the clue to his trouble. He had established his life on Maedchenbrueste, and inexorably, there came the demand to make more life. In the cause of life Maedchenbrueste had fought against him, had dried him to tinder, had achieved the mischief of that night, and had started

the blaze with the fire from space. He looked like a crab on the beach, but he was a man. He ran from bliss and he fought his impulses because he was the highest form of life and had a soul. Nature had raised him to such a stature that he combated Nature. Other life begat life willy-nilly, but he revolted against the primitive tyranny claiming his heritage of free-will. Maedchenbrueste demanded more life for its battle of birth and death, but he was not a crab, and he fought for the right to breed as a reasoning creature above the commands of Nature, advancing the dictates of soul and mind against those commands.

But none of this was clear to me as I went through the dark. I only knew that all the desires which—first from surfeited appetites and pride and then from expediency—I had suppressed, had broken loose. The animal peace—the bovine security—was false and at an end. But I could not see what was to take its place. An electrical storm was in me even as it was in the air. At one moment I thought to fling away discretion, and at the next decided that greater discretion than ever was the only course. I marvelled that I had succeeded in ridding Maedchenbrueste of sex as far as we were concerned for so long, and was forced to admit that the miracle was over.

An intolerable sheet of lightning, a triumphant roar of thunder, and the rain fell in a solid mass. Its onslaught took my breath away. And yet I wel-

comed it, for it was cold and hard-driving, it beat upon me, chilled me, gave me something tangible to combat. I did not run from the rain. I walked more slowly, braced against it, enjoying the sense of effort which it aroused. I could not see a yard, I might have been in the lagoon, the water poured down me in great cold gouts—but I did not think of seeking shelter. I held my face up to its blows ; I reeled on through it like a corpse carried by the tides through the depths of the sea.

I do not know how long I took to complete the circuit of the island, but when I had done so, and had, in some fashion, climbed the slippery hill to the deadhouse, I had regained my composure. The beacon fire was out. The rain had drowned it. The fire was out of my veins. Brain, body and senses were sodden, chilled and weary, but I had a happy sensation of escape. The future depended upon my decision, but I should make it now with the wiser counsel of the dawn. I dried and crept into my blanket. Sleep did not delay : I was a tired animal.

The night took the rain with it, and the day came in blue and washed clean. The air moved freely, and the green things lifted their heads. The events of the previous evening seemed a long way off, and robbed of significance by distance. And yet when I went in to breakfast Moira avoided my eyes, and I was glad she did, for my pulses were unsteady at the sight of her. We talked spasmodically and lazily, and, though this may have been due to nothing more

than relief at being set free from the thunder, to me, in my state, it seemed significant. I felt the others looking at me oddly—looking at us oddly. I fought against it, but I could not shake off the feeling that there was a division between them and us, and that she and I were linked together by a secret of which they were aware.

All this may have been no more than my nerves, but the meal seemed unlike other meals. We watched our plates, when our glances met consciousness of self was in them, and there was no zest in the sentences we exchanged upon the usual topic of what was to be done that day that we might eat. More important matters were in the air. Of course, nothing had happened—Moira and I had been wise and discreet—but our lot has made us crystal clear with the sediment settled so that our thoughts cannot be concealed. It is hard to express. In the crowded other life Moira and I could have done anything overnight and met at breakfast with a casual greeting. But not on Maedchenbrueste, where sex was a corner-stone in the edifice of existence and not a toy. Admittedly, we had succeeded in disregarding that corner-stone, but now that it had forced itself into our attention its importance was paramount.

I wanted to get away from them all, and particularly from her, to think it out. As soon as the meal was over I told them I was going to fish, and they answered me with nods and silence. None offered

to accompany me, though one of them has always joined me of late. The fact confirmed my suspicions, and I went hastily away, an Adam among many Eves with the fruit of the tree of knowledge bitter in my mouth.

The fish were not biting as well as usual, or perhaps the fault was mine : I was not thinking of fish. Noon came, but I did not return for lunch. Instead I went to the beach, ate a few raw oysters and drank coconut-milk from the shell like a wild-man. The day was still and warm. They had rekindled the fire, and its column rose high into the blue, parallel with the feather from the kitchen. There was no other sign of life—of our life, I mean, for, of course, the crabs were still fighting and breeding on the sands and the insects were still singing in the bushes.

I have written above of the sediment having settled in our souls leaving them as crystal. The noon was like that, also. The world was a globe filled with blue water—still, unsullied and clear. Everything was definite and distinct. The shadows were clean-cut and black, the sunlight hot and bright, each grain of coral was a unit in the composition of the shore. I realised that the season changed again, and that the varying and uncertain monsoon passed. The day was good for thinking, and I had much thinking to do. But my thoughts led me to the unescapable truth and to Moira. I wanted her ; I needed her : I had to have her. She was the factor which had been missing from life—

the solace which had set me craving for tobacco and whisky, the excitement in quest of which I had played bridge, and the recompense for all that was lost down here in the depths of the sea. Only preoccupation with the needs of the stomach and the loutish stupidity into which I had sunk, had closed my eyes to such an obvious fact. My dullness seemed shameful. Even a crab on the beach had sufficient intelligence to seek his mate.

Instincts deeply rooted and bared by environment urged circumspection and caution, however. Among the millions of mankind I could have been the individual, Mark Antoine, the first person singular, but that was not possible on Maedchenbrueste. Here I was, whether I willed it or not, driven to think of others, to use the first person plural. I was a chief of a tribe, and any act of mine had to be considered as it would affect my people, as much for my own welfare as theirs. From the sheer proximity in which we dwelt, from the unscaleable walls which rose about us, selfishness might be a sin against self as well as anything else. In addition to all this I had a creator's pride in the social system I had set up—it was a vital part of life, and to shatter it might mean disaster.

I should have gone up to the garden in the afternoon, but I did not. I remained upon the beach, while these conflicting instincts warred within me. The result—if there could be any result in such a stern struggle—was a victory for the strong force of

desire. After all, I thought, no reason and no prudence could prevail against love. Men had flung kingdoms away for it, lives had been sacrificed for it, Troy had burned for it—and why should such a trifle as the peace of Maedchenbrueste be weighed against it? A peace which depended upon a disregard of sex and love was, I told myself, unreal, impracticable and doomed.

But although this was convincing, heartening and delightful, regret remained and fear. The responsibilities and demands of my position could not be argued away, nor a habit of mind engendered by the necessity to keep alive, lightly overcome.

Decision?—there was no decision. When the afternoon waned and I walked the path to the house I was no wiser than I had ever been, save that I was informed of the precise details of the situation. What a cruel and barbaric world was this, so stark that there could be no subterfuges and so uncivilised that what might have been a mere *affaire* became a grim problem more important than food and clad in the dignity which belonged to birth and life and death.

My return was not as it would have been before last night—no questions were asked as to why I had not come up for lunch, and no chatter greeted me. They were busy—feverishly busy—setting the evening meal upon the veranda.

Mrs. Quinlan wished me good-evening, but Anita arranged the chairs, and Moira did not turn.

She studied the table, remarking: "A knife short ——!" and hastened away to get it. For my part I did not know what to say to them, but escaped round the house to put the fish in the safe. Thereafter I loitered about watching the fowls until the tinkle of the bell called me to dinner.

They were all seated when I arrived, and the sun flooded the veranda with rosy light so that they seemed to blush. The hour was hushed, and the scraping of my chair made a startling sound. Anita coughed. Speech was a thing desired but feared. We had lost the tricks of civilisation for carrying off a difficult situation, and the loss was serious. Even an artificial ease would have been safer and more rational than this strained tension which confessed so many things better unconfessed.

Mrs. Quinlan came to the rescue.

"How was the fishing?" she asked, giving me a friendly straight glance. I was grateful for her assistance.

"Not too good," I said. "They didn't seem to bite as they generally do. But I stayed on and caught enough to take us over to-morrow!" And I realised that speech need not be feared, but was a safeguard. I rambled on telling them about the fish, and trying to make it sound ordinary and as it would have sounded before last night. But the very effort defeated its purpose. The level rays of the sun streamed into my face, blinding me. I knew I was talking with mechanical earnestness.

"There were twenty eggs!" said Anita. "Those hens are getting busy again!"

As I had talked about the fish so we all talked about the eggs and the hens, and when that was done Moira, looking closely at Ann, remarked that we should have to gather more wood and put it beneath the house because the stock was low, and after rain such as there was last night it was hard to find anything dry enough to burn. But as she came to the words "last night" she checked and her voice had a breathless note. We were embarrassed. There was only one thing to do, however, and that was to talk. Everybody talked—loudly and meaninglessly in the effort to drown the voices of our souls. But our loquacity, if more bearable than silence, was painful because it was begotten by fear. Although we were dreadfully sorry that the wheat had not prospered and were delighted that the lame brown hen had hatched out the clutch of chickens, these matters were no longer as engrossing as they had been. They were not uppermost in our minds. There was no candour in us. We had food, drink and shelter—these were established and accepted things on which we had no need to dwell—and it was the fact that I was a man and they were women of which we thought but could not speak.

The meal of crab and guava dragged on, and as we finished the sun set. The swift darkness was a mercy, granting us privacy and relief. Our talk ceased. We sat fidgeting with forks, and dreaming

in the purple dusk. I marvelled at how sensitive we had become and how responsive. Little enough had happened to make even Moira and me feel ill at ease, but those others had seen nothing, knew nothing, and were only alarmed by instinct.

Mrs. Quinlan sighed, and rose. We all stood up. They began to gather the dishes, and I left them, going out to the beacon. The night was beautiful, and peopled by a great host of stars. I gave the flames their food, and moved away. A nut falling from a palm made a thud which disturbed me. I was reminded of Ah-lee—poor Ah-lee sleeping in an unmarked grave. My carelessness in this matter seemed suddenly shameful. I had allowed the demands of my stomach to prevent me doing my duty by that faithful friend. I determined to neglect him no longer, and went through the night to the rear of the house where I found the slab of wood I had set aside, and took it to the fire. My mind was full of Ah-lee. He returned good for evil and was still my servant. Though I had forgotten him, in my hour of need he gave me occupation.

I sat down upon a palm trunk close to the fire and taking my knife began to carve his name. There was time and to spare for the task. I cut the A deep and big, shaping it carefully. As I worked the women drifted out of the night, and sat down about the beacon. I was surprised, for I had expected they would leave me alone, and be glad enough to escape from the association which the

meal had imposed upon us. But we seemed to be linked together by our secret knowledge, and unable to seek peace until we had discovered what the outcome would be.

As I worked I saw Moira in silhouette against the stars and the sky. She was looking into the fire, and her face was set, but the uncertain light made it seem that there passed across it the shadows of her thoughts, for now it was all bathed in bright radiance, and now it was white, and now it was shadowed. Her profile was very lovely to see. The high forehead, the straight brows, the perfect line of the nose, the strong mouth and the firm chin had been cut by a master-chisel with flawless skill. Her neck was like a column, and her body was straight and smooth. My imagination played tricks with me. I saw her as I had seen her in the sea while the lightning burned ; I found her in my arms, healthy, firm and keenly alive ; I felt her lips on mine.

But still I worked at the carving, not daring to risk a direct glance. For all the trouble which I knew to be in her she appeared so grave and restrained. I remember how, when she had held my fate in her hands, she had conquered the madness of the night and the promptings of Maedchenbrueste, and had allowed me to go that I might make my choice, unhandicapped by the tricks of the hour. I knew her spirit was as noble as her flesh was desirable, and I decided I would claim her as my wife before them all out there by the fire, heedless of

the consequences. I needed her and had been cautious over long. Nothing mattered save my need.

But here on Maedchenbrueste sex has ceased to be a thing of whims and gratification and has become significant and solemn. My mood was changed swiftly by the thought of action, the thought of taking the step which would bring such a force into our lives finally and for ever. I was daunted. Those other instincts to which I have referred awoke again, putting a brake upon the wheel of passion, which in civilisation runs so swiftly and so smoothly.

What of the rest of them? I stole a look. My God! they were all there—all sitting round the fire and hemmed in by the night—there was no escape for us from them nor for them from us. Anything I did must react throughout our circle. I caught them off-guard, and surprised their souls. They were in a torment of anxiety and dread, which arose from simple, ineradicable, elemental emotions. Sex had not changed merely for me. We dwelt in a fertile world full of eager life and sudden death. Its influence worked in us all. I had only to take Moira, and they were doomed to barren days and lonely nights—the discarded, the neglected, the useless drudges alive but bringing forth no life.

A wave of sympathy and pity swept up in me. They were worthy of a better fate. Anita, upon my other side, was so soft, so gentle, so made for love. The light fell upon her warm mouth, but upon her deep eyes a shadow lay. Forewarned by some

wisdom greater than that of the brain she had commanded me to remember the night on which she sang to me and went away. I remembered now, and it was like a revelation, for I was taught that there in the moonlight she had come close to playing Moira's part but had been merciful and had forborne.

I went back to the hyphen in Ah-lee's name, and now my thoughts followed a very different trend, and I was almost sorry that it had not been Anita who had stood there in the sea.

But that was not all. For when I raised my eyes again they saw through the mist of flame the clear eyes of Ruth. She sat like a child, fresh and clean and young, in the first glow of girlhood, wasting precious youth upon Maedchenbrueste, when she should have been having happiness, fun, excitement, love, dancing, music out beyond the sea. I was reminded that she had saved my life. Youth was a wonderful possession. I bent again hastily to Ah-lee's name.

I could not concentrate upon the task, however, and again I was tempted to consider my people. I saw Mrs. Quinlan. She was working on some plaiting, her attention centred upon it, gentle and tender and capable in the firelight. She brought me to another aspect of this business of sex, one of which I had been only vaguely aware. There would be children—children to be reared and tended and instructed in a bare environment where, if they were

not to be mere young savages, they would require unremitting attention and endless wisdom. I looked at Mrs. Quinlan : she mothered me, she mothered Ann, she mothered us all.

And Ann—even Ann, poor little humble, self-effacing, willing Ann. She, at least, did not enter into the question. But as I reached this decision I wondered by what rule she was set apart from us, forced into a menial, supernumerary rôle. She, in her own class-conscious way, insisted by her attitude that she was still " the maid "—but she was of the same stuff as the others, had a heart, a soul, and a body, one life to live and then one death to die. All these things meant as much to her as they did to us ; it was only that in her we did not acknowledge them. By the vicissitudes of service she had been robbed of her natural rights—been robbed of followers and swains—been condemned to misery in a world more terrifying to her than to any of us, yet she made no complaint and was loyal, willing and heroic. No, not even Ann could be disregarded now.

So I reviewed us and our fate, and, so reviewing, worked on, beset by perplexity and trouble. There could be no denying that we all were linked together, manacled together. I love Moira, it was ordained that I should claim her, and yet I neither looked at her now nor thought clearly of her, for I was too conscious of the others and was no longer alone with her, could never

be alone with her. I had awakened too late. I was doubly trapped—by the desire and the need to mate, and by the discipline of life. The loss of the other world's sophistries left me powerless.

Having reached the end of Ah-lee's name—for that which I have set down more or less concisely came by a slow process and was subject to many digressions—I pondered upon what words I could carve for him, and this I did carefully, welcoming the further escape from the only riddle that mattered. It was difficult to decide, for he was not as us. I did not even know the date of his death. He came to resurrection in my thoughts, and seeing him so clearly I set aside all the high-flown sentences I had contemplated, and instead, began to carve: "Here rests a Perfect Servant." It seemed the most appropriate tribute—the one which would have pleased him best. Service, with him, was not an irksome bondage, but a way of life in which he found content and by which he came to rest.

This was a longer task, though the letters were smaller. I worked on, absorbed. There was no talk in us, but that was not unusual, because long silences come upon us on Maedchenbrueste. We dwell much in ourselves. Sometimes I felt their eyes upon me, but I did not look at them, because, in my heart, I was a traitor, and because I knew not whom I betrayed—whether it was Moira or those others or myself.

And presently a whisper came through the night. The palms sighed. The smoke and flames swayed. The quiet went away, and in its place came a great whispering as of a myriad tongues. The fronds moved against the stars, the grass rustled, the white ashes danced. As the wind strengthened the whisperings grew louder, and presently the night was full of noise and activity and we heard the increasing mutter of the sea.

I said: "The Trades have started again!"

The words broke the spell which had been upon us. They all moved, as if the Trades had stirred them.

"Yes!" they said, and "yes!" nodding at me. We felt old, veterans. The Trades, eh? The wind blew through our hair and into our ears.

"It must be late!" Moira remarked suddenly, and stood up. From where I sat she looked queenly and tall, rising against the sky, so that I dared not stand up, too, lest I should take her in my arms. But the others were all on their feet. They were glad that the vigil was over, and though they knew that the trouble had not passed they welcomed the respite. They smiled; their eyes were brighter; the breeze wrapped their rough clothes about them. Not to-night, said their smiles and their eyes, not to-night! They were not to be scorned and set aside to-night!

I was sorry for them. They drifted away, Moira among them, like smoke blown by the wind. I was left alone in the whispering night, with Ah-lee's

unfinished monument upon my knee. I resumed my carving. I knew not what else to do.

3

And, having recorded these experiences, I am not much wiser. The task has taken the greater part of a day, and the time should have been employed in the garden, which, owing to this interruption in the course of our life, has received no attention from me since the downpour.

I write on the beach. All about there is activity and movement. The shadows of the palms weave around me. From the reef comes the steady boom of the surf, and curtain after curtain of spray hangs there, glistening in the clear sunshine. The sky is very blue and without a cloud. The palms sway and dance, making a great rushing sound. The gulls hang over the reef. It is all just as it was long and long ago. But I dare not dwell on how changed are our circumstances.

I do not believe I love Moira in the sense in which the word is rightly used. I want her, from a strong sexual impulse, but I do not love her. I believe any one of the others might have awakened me if they had been involved in the moment destined for my awakening. But now I need her ; she is the remedy for the sickness which has been upon me. I have been a sick man. Witness the way I studied those crabs. This morning I released the one which remained. I had no further interest in it ; I have

never had any interest in crabs—it was life and its creation, its struggles and its blotting out by death, which led me to watch them. Dimly aware of the incompleteness of my existence I have been envying them. But that is over now. I regret it.

This wind, blowing through darkness and light, has lost none of its maddening quality. It fills the mind with noise and disturbance, making a direct line of thought hard to follow.

Reverting to the main question: my need is a mate. I remember once asking a man who lived in the country—far out in the country—what he did with his time that he found happiness there. "Why," he said, "I dig in the garden, and I watch my children grow!" I laughed, but now I understand what he meant. I believe I could be happy here if I could watch my children grow. After all, what does a man do with life but beget more life and pass on? By the way he may win fame or fortune, but the life he calls out of the void must ever be his greatest interest, his strongest incentive and his highest hope. I have written it before of the crabs: it is his one chance of immortality, his life after death come what may to him.

Curse this wind! How can I think with it blowing through my head?

No, I do not love Moira, or if I do I love them all. But I must have an interest, a reason for being alive other than keeping life in my own carcass. And all the other things which go with mating! I

am getting on, I am growing old, I am lonely. I live in a world in which there is no privacy and no escape, and yet I am alone. I dwell among strangers as a stranger, or at the most, I dwell among a circle of acquaintances. I must have one other soul who is everything to me and to whom I am everything. I have reached the stage—been forced rapidly to it by circumstances—when I must marry and settle down. Strange—but nothing can alter it.

What are these people to me that I should consider them? Better that two should be happy and lead natural lives than that six should be dully not dead. But it is difficult—much more difficult than it seems. Apart from all that I have written there are practical aspects. Well to write of babies, but we have no doctors, no nurses. Birth has become as stark and uncivilised as life. That must be considered—there are many things to be considered. Mrs. Quinlan might know what to do, but, having set her aside, could I count on her for Moira? How strong the urge is—Moira knows our mating would not be mere love and kisses, that it would lead to suffering bad enough out there behind the sky but a hundredfold worse here, and yet she is prepared to go through with it. If there is to be more life on Maedchenbrueste she will have to go down into death to bring it here. And yet she is ready, and the others envy her! And *I* have the impudence to imagine that in this matter I make a serious choice.

So nothing is settled. I must await the course of events, moving circumspectly, not allowing the desires of Maedchenbrueste to work upon my desire and sweep me—and my people—into irremediable ruin. If I am de-civilised I shall at least continue to behave like a man, and perhaps a better man than I was once when I should not have observed so many obstacles between me and a woman I wanted.

Few hours of light are left. Whatever may come from all this there remain fish to be caught, a garden to be dug, fowls to be tended and wood to be gathered. I must lock my book away in my trunk and my thoughts away in my mind, and go on living. I wish they all did not know. I wish I were not Paris.

4

Last night the fire in the kitchen went out for the first time. It did not matter, as it happened, because the beacon was burning, but supposing there had been rain? And the meaning of the thing is painful. The security and the sane orderliness have gone out of our life, just as the peace has gone.

Before this came we were a band of simple people fighting misfortune shoulder to shoulder. We met on a common basis and had nothing to conceal. Now we are all at sixes and sevens, meals are a mockery, and we avoid each other as if there were pestilence among us. Perhaps it is pestilence——!

The wind blowing all the time, too, with its in-

fernal shout, the sea clamouring on the reef like an enemy in bright armour, the palms dancing and beating as if they were tethered birds seeking to escape from this place. My solace is the dark, fertile soil. I love working in it, watching the life spring from its warm depths. It rises triumphant above the death of the sea holding out green arms to the sun. There is joy in turning it with the spade ; it is solid and rich and kind.

We have no new dishes these days. The interest has gone out of food, but we were happier when our minds were the servants of our stomachs. Idle to repine, however. We must face the position. A kind of mock modesty is in me, and, I fancy, in us all. It must be set aside, and we must grapple with this matter as we have with all the others. Maedchenbrueste allows no evasions.

The wind blows all the time.

CHAPTER XI

I

I AM dazed, dumbfounded. It has been like living through a whole life in a few hours. I had been conscious of changes in us and our outlook, but I had not realised how complete and revolutionary they had been. One forgets. Life goes on through light and dark, through rain and sunshine, and the process of erosion has been so gradual, the evolution step by step so gentle, that the numbed mind has not comprehended what has been happening.

But I have spent the morning here beneath the palms reading my diary from that night long ago when I began it, inspired by the loneliness in which I had isolated myself. The number of things I had forgotten! The moods which have been worn away! The wisdom I have acquired and the polish I have lost! As I read the whole thing unfolded before my astonished eyes, like a film in which I had played while in a trance.

It was hard to credit that I had written those early pages. Mark Antoine wrote them. Surely Mark Antoine is dead, and I who am writing this am some other person inhabiting his shell—and not even the same shell. How can I ever have been

surfeited with the other world, dazzled by its lights, deafened by its voices and sickened of its riches? I do not mean that I am so hungry for the world that I cannot believe I ever flung it away, but simply that I never seem to have had such experience. All this is so real, and all that other is a fantastic memory from an earlier existence.

And yet I have been reminded that there was a time when everything on Maedchenbrueste was theatrical and artificial and we were all involved in a painful farce. These women who are my companions—and, indeed, are the human race!—came as I did to escape from the world; but we were so much a part of it that we brought its atmosphere here, making all this tinsel and sham.

That passed. I had forgotten how I hated them, scorned them, insulted them; I had forgotten how they came as lies and I knew them for lies. In those days I was a man of the world, and understood them because they were types with whom I was all too familiar. But they have ceased to be that now, and have changed as much as Mark Antoine and this world. They have lost the decorations, the patterns, and the blemishes imposed on them by civilisation. I do not know them in their new nakedness. My wisdom was blindness.

At times as I read I sighed enviously and thought: Ah, I was sharp in those days—I should never have seen that now! But it is not so. The things I saw were those to which I had grown accustomed—

the false and the artificial. These women of mine seemed artificial and false because that was all I looked for in them—all my eyes were trained to see. They annoyed me because I looked for annoyance ; they appalled me by their truth to type because I catalogued them as types. There were scenes in those early pages which made me blush, and there were scenes which made me want to laugh, but not with the hard laughter which was in us when they happened—with a kind of rueful, sorrowful laughter which pitied the little world-embellished puppets who could not see what a stern school they had entered.

Laughter ? It strikes me that one of the things a man loses as he slips back is a sense of humour. We no longer appreciate the humour of word or thought. The broadly comic—a fall or an accident —makes us laugh, but we have no jokes, no jests, no wit. We laugh when we are happy, too, but we are seldom mentally amused, save, as I say, by the untoward event. The women cry over little things, but their tears mean less and pass swiftly. Most of the time our faces are expressionless, because the minds behind them are not working with the force they once had.

But that is a digression, due to the wind blowing through my head.

It was so strange reading these books. I was glad I had kept them, for the memory is an odd thing. If I had been asked to recall what had happened here

I should have talked at length of recent things—the fish we had caught, the iguana we had eaten, the wheat we had tried to grow—and all the significance of the contrast between our days when it was a joke we had built up—a joke rendered grim by the wiliness of forgotten Captain Smyth—and these later days when we have faced realities, would have been lost upon me.

Lady Moira in her bold evening gown, Anita Shaw on the raft making such a fool of herself, Mrs. Quinlan maddening me with her wisdom and graciousness, Ann's goggling eyes—oh, strange! strange! I had forgotten it all. I remembered the first palm salad and the first bridge game, and the day the fowl fell into the tank. But none of the important things—none of the things which make up life for human beings.

How sham and foolish seems the vow I made, and the roots from which it sprung. Why should Mark Antoine of all people make such a vow?—yet it was the kind of test he would set himself, and he was a sick man then, and much more sick than he realised. It was odd to trace—like another's folly—how that vow's influence persisted even after it was forgotten, and how deep was its grip upon the subconscious mind.

The experience has been like looking at life from the splendid perspective of a god. One has seen so much, smiled here, pitied there, and after all it has not mattered.

For there was I imagining myself to be a reasoning being steering the ship of my days with a strong hand within the limits of this world, and all the time I was the toy of fate, the plaything of Maedchenbrueste. That which I resolved to-day was set at nought to-morrow, and so inevitably and quietly that I was only foggily aware of the fact or even blissfully unconscious of it. I would speak to them no more, and here I spoke to them as a matter of course ; I would never enter the house again, and here I was dwelling in the house and congratulating myself on my wisdom ; I would never allow them to regain the sovereignty of their kind over me, and here I was recognising that they had saved me from madness, appreciative of their endless help, wisdom and companionship, and finally overwhelmed by them because of none of these things but simply on account of their sex.

Poor stupid, foolish, feeble, blind Mark Antoine—he had guessed something of the truth when he compared himself with the crabs on the beach. I see it all now. God, Fate, Destiny, Circumstance, Maedchenbrueste—these things ran his life for him, while he imagined that he was proving a very devil of a navigator, though the wide spaces of the night warned him and he was mocked by the immensity of the sea.

The women have got me. It is my fate, and I was foolish to have raged against such a happy state of affairs. I see in it now an attempt to be dignified,

a futile assertion of independence as a reasoning creature which was doomed to be disproved. I suppose the only solace for the vanquished is the thought that they can accept defeat with a good spirit. Perhaps that is why I can write that I do not begrudge my women their success. I admire them, I respect them—they have behaved magnificently, they have conquered me.

I believe for all its ruthless struggle between life and death there is more charity and justice on Maedchenbrueste than in man's law-ridden, refined world. This because I am reminded of the harshness of my judgments once. I should not condemn man or woman now for any crime save for the protection of the remainder, and, if it were necessary, regret and pity would be in me. I should see the culprit even as we have been here on Maedchenbrueste—as a luckless creature in the grip of mysterious forces, tragic because his strength and his freedom were delusions and gallant because he fought with a sword no stronger than the claw of a crab.

This is no gospel of despair I write out of the wisdom of Maedchenbrueste, for I know that the sea and the sky and the forces beyond the stars which make our lives have some purpose and some scheme. They must have. The nut which falls from the palm becomes another palm that the isle may be more fruitful, but beyond that there is something else. It all leads somewhere. Perhaps if I live long enough I may find out.

I had not intended to write all this—I did not know I even thought it—but it has arisen from my glance back through the compact development of life since we were born into Maedchenbrueste playing the games of spoilt children. We have become adults.

It is late afternoon. I have been here since dawn, alone with these books and my thoughts. I must go up to the house to eat. It is so strange, all this. I shall meet them. They will wonder what I am going to do and when the unrecognised forces will sweep us on further into life. I shall be sitting at the head of my table with those women who are my all, and I shall be so much wiser than they because I have not forgotten, as they have, that words may be written on paper with pen and ink.

But my wisdom will not save me.

2

Death, though so terrible, is the sauce of life, giving it savour. I think we all learnt that to-day.

We were working in the garden, repairing the damage which has followed swiftly on neglect. The morning was bright and inspiriting. Only the disquiet in our hearts marred our happiness, and there was balm even for that in the task on which we were engaged. We did not talk, but dug, weeded and hoed with quiet concentration.

Ann gave the alarm.

"Oo!—the sea!"

Her cry was sudden, sharp and full of anguish. The sea? What was the matter with the sea? I looked up in panic. It is difficult to describe what was the matter with the sea. That which came across its surface was not a wave but a swelling, as if a monster moved beneath. The waves ran on, but they were upon the shoulder of a vast hill of water, sloping gently up and shutting out the horizon, creating a new horizon, unnaturally near. The effect was agonising. The solid earth seemed to sink beneath the feet, giving a feeling of nausea in the pit of the stomach. I looked at that great, devastating mass in dumb horror, seeing in it the end of us, of Maedchenbrueste, of everything.

The sea closed in upon us at last to take back to its heart this little, lost isle. I stared, spade in hand, a savage confronted by the inexplicable. The sky still smiled, the wind still blew, but there came death. I could not even exclaim against this cruelty.

The women, moaning, crept to me. I saw them without moving my gaze from advancing death. I held out my arms to them. I was helpless as they, but, God knows, in that moment I would have done anything and made any sacrifice to protect them. The boast is idle—there was nothing I could do—but, God knows, it is true. Perhaps they felt that. They clung to my arms, to my body, they cleaved to me before advancing death as if I had the power to lift them up above its sea. But I could not do that; I could not move; I could not speak. I

stood there with them clinging to me on Maedchenbrueste's hill.

That other hill came on. It grew, it swelled, it piled up and up. As it neared the reef the water ran back to meet it, adding to its might. The ocean seemed to be taking a new level. I saw the reef laid bare for a moment, and beyond it the great wall, I know not how high. It rose into the sky. And then, when it seemed that nothing could prevail against the sea, the labours of insects through the centuries saved Maedchenbrueste. Death broke upon the achievement of a million million million tiny lives—it broke in a roaring, thundering, cannonading maelstrom—but it broke.

The reef stood firm. The wave, too mighty to admit the check, swung away on either hand and raged on where there was nothing to deny its might. That which came rushing and roaring across the lagoon was no more than its crest and the noisy boastings of the defeated. Yet even this was horrible. There had always been peace within the coral wall, but now there was wildest turmoil. Surely our defences had been penetrated by a force sufficient to destroy us!

But it was not so. The storm of broken water mounted in the shallows again, and broke again on the beach. It swept forward among the palms. They drowned in it and were dashed away. The sea crept foaming up on the breasts of the isle, rending and ravenous. The air was full of driving spray.

Where the beach had been: white water; where the first lines of the palms had stood: white water. The eyes saw through a fog of amazement. Maedchenbrueste was changed, was unrecognisable. The mind could not take it all in. The women screamed. I was dizzy and sick. I could not dare to hope.

And the sea went on, around the breasts, between the breasts, foiled and in retreat. It ran in a great rout. There were two islands where there had been one. But Maedchenbrueste would rise again. The strain had been indescribable. The women fell from me to the ground. They buried their faces in the earth, shutting out the sight of the sea. I wanted to watch it, to see it all, to miss none of it But I did not. The strength went out of me, also. Even now, only a few hours afterwards, I cannot recapture the sensation of that moment. It was more than an escape from death—it was a victory for life. I sat among the yams, running the black soil through my fingers, and I wept for joy.

It had seemed that Maedchenbrueste must vanish from the world as completely as the breasts of Helen, but Maedchenbrueste remained triumphant. The sun shone upon it, the breeze harped in the palms and we were alive. I loved my island, loved my people, and loved life, marvelling that I had not valued them properly until they were in danger of being snatched away. Death had instructed me, awakened me, aroused me, and Death went on. I looked about. The lagoon on either side was still

in a wild flurry, that which had been the beach was a mass of wreckage, the island had the appearance of a ship which had weathered a great storm and suffered much damage. Far away the wall dwindled into the emptiness of the sky. I wondered how far it would travel before the ocean swallowed it again ; I wondered what new isle had been created—it did not occur to me that an isle might have been destroyed.

There was a salty reek in the air, and from the broken palms a thin mist of steam arose, but otherwise peace was restored. The women were on their knees now, as if they prayed. The swoop of destruction had been like that of a hawk, and we still crouched down to the earth, shuddering, though the peril had passed. I rose, and moved about surveying the damage. There was none ; the debris on the shore, the debris in the cleft between the hills, the demolition of the swimming place—these things were no more than reminders of the fate we had escaped.

The miracle of our good fortune dawned fully upon me. I began to caper, as a savage or a child does. I did a dance of triumph upon the crest of Maedchenbrueste. And my women rose unsteadily to their feet, laughing at me and crying. They waved their arms, the winds blew their wrappings about, they danced. We were all mad up there on the hill-top. Our trouble was forgotten in this great mercy. We were as we had been before sex came,

because we wanted nothing save the knowledge that we were alive and that Maedchenbrueste had survived the onslaught of the sea. Everything was good.

And even when the first elation passed the consciousness of self was not restored. We planned what we should do for Maedchenbrueste, as though we were tenants who had become owners. We were proud and ambitious. The sea of Death had swept up at us and had been repulsed. We were confirmed in possession, and in some strange way Maedchenbrueste possessed us more completely than ever. When we could rejoice no more and could discuss and plan no more, we went back to our work in the garden eagerly and fervently, as if it were a religious rite to dig that soil. It is night now, we are about the fire, but we are wiser, richer people than we were this morning, though our problem is still unsolved.

3

I awoke from the horrible dream in a sweat of fear. I had been on an island—a bewitched place where I was surrounded by the fantastic perils which are in my dreams. A wave blacker than pitch had curled above me to sweep me into death, and then, as one does, I awoke. The relief was like rain in a desert land. I drew a deep breath of gratitude. What time was it? I could not see the luminous face of the clock. Ah-lee must have forgotten to put it out. My hand fumbled for the bell-push and

the electric switch, for I was thirsty and had no wish to sleep again. The roar of traffic was in my ears, and yet it was still dark. I could not find the switch, but, flinging over, saw the palms against the stars, and heard the great voices of the wind and sea.

For a second I was at a loss, and then Maedchenbrueste became the kingdom in which I dwelt. The events of the day were restored to me, made vivid by the dream. I was caught again in my mood of the morning, and rising went to the window.

It was the uttermost hour of the night before the coming of dawn's first breath. The darkness was a witch's cauldron. The palms, the sea and the wind were the components of a black brew, knowing no rest and no peace but kept in constant activity by an unseen fire of which the stars were sparks. This way and that the sea surged and the palms bubbled. The fumes of the wind rushed into my nostrils, heavy with the tang of salt. I became a part of this secret boiling in the black pot. Sitting on the sill I abandoned my senses to its excitement.

I was akin with all these elements. My heart throbbed with the stars, and my blood ran with the wind. This was my world! I had never been at ease in that other world because I could not keep step with the marching feet of the millions. Here I was king and god, unquestioned master of a world beautiful as Eden. At last I had achieved complete freedom from the tyranny under which the over-civilised, crowded, suffering hordes of humanity

dwelt. I had found the secret of content by eliminating the superfluities with which the ages had cumbered existence. I dwelt on Maedchenbrueste as the one free man, the one happy man, alive.

I have written of this island as if it were a prison, but it has not been a prison for a long time. Its problems and difficulties have been irksome occasionally—like those of any other world—but it is not a prison. It is my home, my world. I cannot conceive returning to the civilised globe. I write this now, because, as I sat there, it came gradually into my mind, like a dawn breaking. In it and in the wisdom I had learnt under the shadow of the sea lay the germ of my inspiration, though I cannot trace its development into the complete idea.

All I know is that sitting in the noisy dark I found myself in possession of the key to the door on which we had been beating. Let me put it down simply. Polygamy—that was the key !—older than the code of the Western world and still retained by the wise East. I had been of the West ; I was shocked at first ; I shrank from that key. But presently I recognised this attitude as an empty echo from the dead life persisting long after it had any reason. There was nothing immoral in polygamy. The word was a bogey which frightened me. I and the men among whom I had lived were all polygamists when one thought of it, but in secrecy and shame because we offended against the laws of our land. On Maedchenbrueste the old laws of sex had no more value

and no more application than a rule of the road. Laws were made for the good of the community. We were a different community.

All this was no matter of temptation, no question of throwing decency and order to the wind. I have had such temptations, of course, and have resisted them, because Maedchenbrueste has revealed to me the pride, dignity and responsibilities of power. This was quite apart from desires or passion. I was a new Moses in a new world. I had to give the law to five women and one man, and I had tried to do so wisely, building up a social system appropriate to the circumstances. In the name of justice and decency there was only one law I could give on the vital point of sex—polygamy.

The roar of the wind swept up, the palms tossed more wildly and the sea shouted. All Maedchenbrueste rejoiced with me at the decision. Life was promised reinforcements; life had gained another victory. The hosts of coconuts which had fallen from the palms to beget more palms—all the seemingly wasted fertility of Maedchenbrueste—had justification. Maedchenbrueste had become the home of man—life's highest manifestation. The wheel moved on.

Where before I had seen only confusion I now beheld a great struggle against the encompassing darkness, a persistence of energy despite the deadening weight of night. The palms, the sea and the wind raged all together against death's shadow,

sleep. They had awakened me. I might have wasted the hours, but the forces of Maedchenbrueste had aroused me and given me the law.

They shouted in exultation to me and for me. Away in the East the light appeared, weaving like a pale mist but drawing strength from the sun in ambush below the world. It grew, stealing up and out, permeating the solid darkness with the irresistible strength which enables the young roots to force their way through stone. Life flushed through it ; it spread and spread up from the sea. The stars went out ; the walls of darkness were demolished ; the grey uncertainty changed to scarlet and pearl. The dawn created the world again, fresh and bright and clean.

Having waited to see the life-giver rise from the sea, I sat down to write. It is broad day now. The colour is restored to everything. The wind hurries into this place and out again. The palms flaunt against the blue. A pool of gold lies upon the floor near the window. This is the hour at which I usually awaken, and yet so much has happened : I have come out of darkness and uncertainty into light and conviction.

I shall leave the house now, and stay away all day, for I want to think, and it will be wiser to expound the new law to-night. The marks of the old fetters are visible in the daylight. I cannot tell my people while the sun shines. There is nothing shameful in it—nothing indecent—nothing evil—but, somehow,

it would be impossible to explain at the breakfast table, in the clear morning, in the hot afternoon. It would be easier to remain silent, of course, and simply take first this one and then that in secret and by falsehood. This is not a question of ease, however, and there shall be no subterfuges and no deception. We deal now with The Law.

4

Ann had just flung fuel upon the fire. The flames leapt up, fanned by the wind. The bright sparks danced wildly, and were gone. I stood down the slope in the outer darkness. The crest rose against the starry sky with the palms restless behind it as the waves of the sea. The ruddy pool of light seemed apart. I could view its people dispassionately as a spectator.

Ann sat down again, brushing her hands. Janet raised her head, and said something, and the girl smiled and nodded. The three others were beyond the fire. Anita was working on the tortoise-shell she is polishing to make into ornaments, but Moira and Ruth were idle, hands in laps, meditative, looking into the flames. Ann and Janet went on talking; the rest paid no attention.

They sat upon bare earth, their clothes were mere wrappings, they had the aloofness and self-centrement of primitive peoples, but above all this there was something which betrayed the group as uncivilised. I cannot describe it—a difference, a

rudeness, a truth. There was no animation, no politeness, no convention. I was reminded, suddenly, of Papuans about a camp-fire at Hanuabada, outside Port Moresby. They had sat like that, the same suggestion had hung about them, and I had wondered—I remembered—what they thought and whether they were happy and what use life was to them. They had seemed such strange people, so inexplicable and so mysteriously simple. And yet a little contact with the rain and the sun, the wind and the sea, and our tribe was not unlike them.

I was reassured. In the course of the day I had passed through many moods, and had even wondered whether the new Law was practicable. Standing in the darkness looking up at the fire and the seeing the faces of my people, I knew the Law was good.

I went up to them, and, coming to the edge of the light, paused. My advent was a surprise, for my bare feet made no sound. They questioned me with their eyes, and I saw their mouths set as they realised I came with tidings. I was glad I had chosen this moment, for it was dramatic and fitting. My position on the edge of the night rising above them gave me dignity. I stood still for a time, gathering their attention and concentrating their thoughts upon me. It was necessary that this should be done in a seemly fashion.

They were anxious to hear me. The night was full of the music of the wind, the sea and the fire—an incessant anthem of the great forces of Nature.

But when I came to speak, though I knew so well what I wished to say, I had no words. I could only look at them down in the brightness, and stand challenged by their eyes, but silent.

And then, before I knew that I had begun, my voice was mingling with the voices of Maedchenbrueste.

"I see what we must do," I told them. "It seems a strange way out, but it's the only one. There's no need for reticence between us—we know what's come over us—we know what's gone wrong with our world." I paused. Their faces showed alarm and eagerness, for they imagined I had come to a choice. "No," I said, "not that. Not any one of you—not any one!" But after all it was hard to say. They were puzzled. "We're not," I went on, "in the other world now, and I'm not talking of the love you used to dream about and I used to wonder about. That kind of love might be here, but it isn't. We must live without it, just as we must live without lots of other things." They leant forward now, tensely, drinking every word. I saw their knuckles pressed against the earth. "Now that it's come, we can't escape from sex. We have no right to—you know that!" They wanted to shake their heads in denial, and deep in their eyes panic was born. "I am fond of you all—in a way I love you all—I——"

I could not say it. I had misjudged my strength. One by one they would have to be told, and allowed

to make their choice. But they knew. Moira suddenly fell forward on her knees, her face turned up to me, her hands clenched against her cheeks.

"I know what you're trying to say!" she cried, not angrily but in amaze.

I stared at her. She sprang up: they all sprang up. Watching me with wide eyes they began to draw away, their feet shuffling in the dust. They moved rigidly, uncertainly, like timid animals confronted by the unknown, and then stood gazing from the other side of the fire. They did not scorn or hate me, because they too have heard the voices of Maedchenbrueste, but the fetters had cut more deeply into them. The code had been stricter upon them through generations, and they could not lose it so easily. I had forgotten that. I swear it was not merely selfish desire that had prompted me, but I had not allowed for their view-point. The strange, self-protective shame of women rose in their faces.

"I'm sorry," I said quietly. "I didn't intend to frighten you, and I see you must have time to think. I promise you shall have that time. But I want you to face this bravely as you have all the rest. This is the most important thing of all. We're making a new world here—don't let's start all wrong on the most important point—don't let's start by putting a cloud of falsehood about sex. I could have won you one by one, dirtily, unfairly—and perhaps you wouldn't have minded that so much!—but I wanted to try and keep this clean and open like all the rest

of life on Maedchenbrueste. I want you—by God, I do !—but I want you as part of Maedchenbrueste, and not on the old false terms that would have ruled back in the world. Think of all that—look into your hearts ! And remember I am no more the man I was than you are the women you were. Remember that I am better, that you are better, and that Maedchenbrueste is better than the world ! Remember, also, that the judgments of our old, empty selves and our old, empty lives are without value here ! "

I held out my hands to them, and the song of Maedchenbrueste went on and on, repeating my words, supporting the wisdom of all I had said and left unsaid, praying that the wheel be allowed to turn.

They had no answer. The fire was sinking, and they were not clearly visible now. The night wrapped about them. But I knew they were terrified, shocked and bemused. Sex was a stronger impulse in them than in me, and for that very reason was slower to hear the voice of logic. A temptation might have swept them away—perhaps in the past they had been tempted on smaller provocation—but that was not fitting to such an occasion as this. I was not the devil's advocate preaching a gospel of lust. I spoke the simple creed of our world.

Nothing I said could help them. I had done my share, and had to leave the rest to Maedchenbrueste. I knew that voice would win them over. I had done the honest thing, at least, and what I believed to

be the right thing. I could do no more. It rested now in mightier hands. I stepped back out of the firelight. They did not speak again, but moved away also, a cluster of fading shadows. The smoke blew into my eyes, setting them smarting as if with tears.

I had a momentary sense of regret that I had chosen the rough path, and I believed I had been foolhardy, but I crushed these emotions, for I will not admit that truth and candour and good intent are deplorable on Maedchenbrueste where we start afresh. It would be a poor thing if all we can do is to set up the standards of the other world which was so old, so disillusioned.

I walked along the crest, and, standing in the night, found ambition moving in me—the ambition to become the head of a real tribe and establish life here as something native to the soil. It is a good ambition and a high ideal. We who were so wearied, so bored, so idle, have been saved. We shall rear a new race here, dwelling in peace, order and freedom, neither savage nor civilised, children of the sun and the sea, and living under better laws than those which all the centuries have given to the world. Fate did not make us castaways, but has restored us to the Garden.

The world is well lost. What more could we get from life than is offered to us here though we were kings of half the earth? We have kept all that is of value, and lost only the dross. Admittedly, there

are many obstacles to be overcome, but that is only part of the struggle, and we shall conquer them as we have conquered the lesser difficulties. I see one point already. This life we begin must not vanish in a morass. Ann and Ruth are young. They must stand aside to be wives to my eldest sons. And then ?—then new blood will come here, as certainly as there is sun and rain to make the green things grow. For all is part of a system extending to the furthest star.

I write by the beacon, and now that I have done the beacon can go out, and the night will possess Maedchenbrueste. The island will sink back into the immense darkness. None will stand guard over this useless blaze to-night nor any other night. The fire on the hearth is all we need. The flames are so low now that I can scarcely see to write this. The wind beats at them, hurrying them to oblivion. We shall extend the garden along the sheltered side of this ridge. It is good soil, and I am a tiller of the soil, for I am Mark Antoine, the Patriarch.

CHAPTER XII

I

I SHOULD not be wasting time with the pen, but before the light goes I must record the events of this day—the greatest in my life. There seems to be no reason why I should not get away the day after to-morrow. Of course, I shall have to practise handling her in the lagoon before starting out in earnest, but, even so, if the sail is finished to-morrow, I shall be ready by the day after. There is a lot to do ; it will be a rush. I shall take some live fowls. I had not thought of that before. A small crate would be the thing for them. The fire is going to be a difficulty. There is an awful lot to do.

I am tired and excited, and my head is so full of ideas that I cannot concentrate on what I have to write. But it is grand, glorious !—like resurrection after the grave. Every inch of me is tingling. I could sing for joy. In one revolution the world has spun out of topsy-turvydom and nightmare mists into sanity and reality.

I was up before the sun, for the events of last night had made me restless. I had been blundering along with my plans and dreams, but all that does not matter now. It ceased to matter from the

moment I stepped on to the veranda. The sun was just rising from the sea, the surf hazed, and the wind ran shouting. It was all so familiar. But down on the lagoon a raft floated, or so I fancied in that first moment. I was bewildered, believing that either I dreamed now or had dreamt the destruction of Captain Smyth. I staggered, as if a knife had been thrust between my ribs. It was not a raft —it was an outrigger canoe! I was overwhelmed. I have no memory of leaving the house, but I found myself capering on the beach while the canoe drifted crookedly, the shreds of its matting sail fluttering.

I was crazed with glee. I wanted that canoe more than I ever wanted anything before. I could not wait for it. With my strip of blanket still about my waist I ran into the lagoon. Sharks and snakes were forgotten—I had no caution—I was like one demented. I swam as if Maedchenbrueste had sunk into the sea, and the canoe was my hope of life. The water was cool and green. The canoe was further out than it seemed, and it went away from me. I did not care. I knew I should get it. It hesitated. Caught by a new gust of wind it came towards me like a friend. I seized its bow, clung to it and then, with a whoop of triumph, scrambled aboard.

I was sobered promptly. There was a voyager in that canoe. Up in the stern lay the naked body of a native woman, horrible, blackened and mummified by wind and sun, torn by hungry beaks, the white

of bones showing through the leathery skin. It had no face at all. The shock took me aback. I sat down in the opposite end of the boat, and tried to think.

The canoe was made from a great hollowed log with a heavy outrigger over which was a platform. Unlike most native craft she was not littered with rubbish, but was empty and bare save for that one passenger. It was puzzling, but looking more closely I saw that the bony legs and bony arms were tied to the sides in such a way that she had not been able to move. The absence of water gourds and so forth was explained. My salvation had been accomplished by a hell of suffering brought about by some dark crime of passion or revenge. She had been put adrift to die. Her corpse had sailed to Maedchenbrueste to set me free.

Now that I come to write it I seem to have been callous, but I was so excited, so full of life, that I gave scant thought to the dead. I wanted full possession of the canoe. Maedchenbrueste has hardened me. I went up to the stern, broke the rotten bonds, and pushed the awful thing over the side, hastily, for it crumbled in my hands. I suppose I should have buried my rescuer, not flung her to the sea, but she was dead and I was alive. I had no time to spare for sentiment.

While the splash still troubled the surface I surveyed my new possession. The waves had battered her, the rattan lashings were weather-worn so that

the outrigger was in danger of falling to pieces, but she was stout and with these defects remedied and a new sail would be as seaworthy as ever. Though death barred the way I would sail back to the world in her. I put it down as if it were a decision I reached at that moment, but it was not. I made no decision ; it was made for me. From the first second when I comprehended the canoe I had accepted the fact as a matter of course. Queer !

A cry aroused me. I looked across the water. It was a peculiar experience. I was outside Maedchen-brueste. The fishing platform had been almost as far from the beach, but now I had no connection with the land and was cut off from it. The women had come down ; they stood in the water shading their eyes against the level rays. Ruth held up her arms and waved. I watched them with curiosity. The broken riff-raff of the wave lay like a fence along the shore, the palms swayed behind, the twin hills rose against the blue, smoke stole from the kitchen chimney. I was apart from all this ; I was to go away.

" Canoe ! " I shouted. I felt proud, gleeful and superior to them.

They answered excitedly, all together. They jumped about. I sat in my canoe.

" Come in ! " they urged.

That was the thing to do—go in and get busy. A paddle was attached to the stern as a rudder. I wrenched it off, and with it worked the canoe to-

wards the shore. It was slow and difficult, for she was unwieldy and I paddled unhandily, but when I got the knack of it she went ahead. The women ran out to meet me, and when I drew close I was frightened that in their excitement they might do some harm to my canoe, or, perhaps I was only jealous of my property.

I threatened them with the paddle.

"Stand back," I shouted. "She may fall to bits! Keep your hands off!"

They were still, watching me oddly as if I were a stranger. The canoe passed among them. They followed in her wake. I beached her carefully, and turning about faced the strange, silent group. I felt full of energy, but they seemed dull and numbed. They needed stirring up. There was a lot to do.

"Wake up—what's the matter with you all?" I asked. "Don't you understand?—We've been saved by a miracle and now we've got to get busy. Don't you understand? There's a chance for us now. Cheer! Sing! Dance! Don't stand there gaping!"

They angered me with their white faces and their odd glances. I was going to risk my life for them, but they did not seem to grasp what I was saying. They were like a lot of savages, touching the canoe with their fingers and studying me with shy, sideways glances. My enthusiasm was damped. I felt vaguely uneasy.

"What's the matter with you all? Are you asleep?"

"Are you going to try—to try to get away—in that?" asked Moira in a toneless voice.

"Of course I am!"

"But—supposing you die out there?" Anita suggested. "It's not so much better than the raft would have been!"

They drew closer, and all took up the futile litany of cowardice. I believe they regretted that the door had opened. I seemed to puzzle them. But it was all so obvious.

There could be no question of risk now. If I failed I failed, but at least I should have had the satisfaction of having made an effort and not rotted my life away. I looked beyond them to the sea which was bright with the sun. It was a wall no longer, but a path which led back to the world. I marvelled that I had not built some kind of boat and made the attempt long ago. Those women still dwelt in yesterday. Yesterday was dead. We had to get started.

"No use arguing about this," I interrupted. "We can't stay here for ever, and that's the end of it. If I don't get through you'll be none the worse off here. It's a risk, but it's something to do, and I'm sick of just living. I'm going to start something. We've no time to waste on talk. I want to get away to-morrow, and there's lots to do!"

They all said, "To-morrow?" after me in sur-

prise, as if they had imagined I was going to fool about on Maedchenbrueste for years.

"To-morrow!—So there's not a minute to waste!"

They would have stayed there gossiping all day, discussing this business as if we were still lotus-eaters. I had to cut them short. Wonderful what a difference it makes having an interest in life and something to do which leads somewhere! We have got more done to-day than in the whole month before. We are making a sail from a canvas curtain which hung in the hall. It will be small, but that is just as well, for I am no seaman. I fancy it would be called a lug-sail. She will not need a great deal to take her along. I have just finished the outrigger. The question of supplies is the point now. Practically everything will be perishable, unfortunately, but that cannot be helped. I do not need much to keep me alive. My course will lie west, and the wind—such as there is—will serve well. I shall have to steer by the sun. I cannot spend any more time upon this. I must make out a list of what I shall take—my luggage!

To be getting away—to be leaving all this hateful monotony and inaction—to have found something worth doing. God, how have I ever stood it, and what a fool I have been not to have had the initiative to make this venture long ago. Just like Mark Antoine to wait until a dead woman came to set him free. But I have no time for moralisings.

2

The wind is not so strong as it seems. We have always heard it in the palms. This year the Trades came late and have soon lost their strength. It is only a breeze on the sea. She goes along splendidly before it now that I have got the sail right. I am proud of her. I went out beyond the reef, and she rode the waves like a cork. They are long slow rollers. It is just as well I am a good sailor.

I am writing by the beacon. Everything is ready. The women are putting the finishing touches to a spare sail. The canoe is laden. After all I have given up the idea of a fire and the live fowls. It will be easier to live on fruit and vegetables. She is jammed full of coconuts, yams, bananas, pine-apples, guavas and paw-paws. The water is stowed in all kind of utensils. With care I should be able to last a month. It will mean short rations, but that will not hurt me. I am taking eggs and four cooked fowls. More would be no use ; they would go bad before I could eat them. I cannot think of anything that has been overlooked.

I make no claim to be a brave man, but I am not afraid. Compared with Maedchenbrueste and its problems this enterprise is a holiday. It will be like getting out of gaol, and no price is too high to pay for freedom. If I die I die, but I shall not die, though the women mourn for me already. They

do not understand. They think that I am mad, but it is they who are mad. They would have us here for ever, rather than take a fair risk. I was like that once. The opium of Maedchenbrueste drugged my senses. But I have been away from Maedchenbrueste, and so I am rid of the poison.

I cannot start to write—I cannot start to think—of all this means. There has been no time to realise the miracle to the full. I have just had to accept it, and rush on with my preparations. I cannot realise that this is the last night I shall sit here ; that by this time to-morrow I shall be far from Maedchenbrueste and on my journey to the world. Never again to sit here in the firelight among the palms with the dim shadow of the house before me ! Never again to dig in the garden or fish in the lagoon ! Never again to stand upon the veranda and look out over the reef at the wall of sea and sky ! All finished, all over, all done with ! I am wildly glad ; I hate this place.

The women are silent. It is funny : I seem to have drifted away from them. They belong to Maedchenbrueste, but I do not. I have stepped out of the tribe into my canoe. We no longer meet as familiars. The shadow of the other night lies between us, too. I do not wonder that I could not propound that crazy law by daylight. It required the darkness and the wind in the palms. It—but that does not matter now. It is of the past, and to-morrow Maedchenbrueste and all this life will be

in the past and lost below the horizon. I trouble about it no more.

The women are sad. They weep for me as a brave man, and they vow that my sacrifice is too great. They have urged me, they have prayed to me not to go ; they have brought up my silly arguments of yesterday, reminding me that what I go out to is suicide and certain death upon the terrible sea. I am filled with wonder, and if I can be the means of saving them it is doubly worth doing now. Their spirit is beyond praise. They are as eager as I to see the world again, they are as glad as I to have escaped that mad empire of a dream, and yet the thought of me going out to my death weighs more with them than all this. Mock heroics? I do not think so—I think we are merely facing the position.

A while ago Anita looked up, her eyes deep shadows.

" We're going to miss you, Mark," she sighed.

And Moira : " Should you go ? "

All glances turned to me. We had been over it a score of times, and yet they still expected an answer other than the only one I had to give. I shook my head.

" It'll be lonely for the first day or so, but then you'll be better off," I replied. " There's no getting away from it : one man here is worse than none, and there's always the chance I may reach Samarai or be picked up. I tell you I'm convinced it will

come out all right. You must be sensible. If you're lonely at first remember that I may get through!"

"We don't matter," said Janet. "It's you——!"

"Yes—you!" they said.

"Surely—surely one of us at least can go too and share the risk?" urged Moira.

But we had had that out before also.

Again I shook my head, and then, to silence them, began to write. It is a strange thing to confess, but I am positively sure now that there is no room for love on Maedchenbrueste. I love none of them, though I admire them all. We learnt too many lessons together and understand each other too well to know romantic love. While life went on in its everlasting groove we got on very well, and they were my only real interest, just as I was theirs. But now it is different. This new adventure overshadows everything. I can concentrate on nothing else. Sex, for me, has ceased to be an adventure. I am a man, and have work to do.

And now to bed, for to-morrow night I do not expect to get much sleep. I shall be at sea!—at sea!—at sea! I shall take my papers, and keep up this record. It will give me something to do. But I write no more upon Maedchenbrueste. They will stay on, sitting here about the fire, but I shall be out at sea. It is well I am tired, for I must sleep to-night. To-morrow the canoe sets out from Maedchenbrueste for one of two destinations—the

world or death. But—and this is why I am a fortunate and happy man—it also sails to freedom and to high endeavour. Good-night to Maedchenbrueste! Good-bye to Maedchenbrueste! To-morrow I come to resurrection.

3

The wind has fallen and the sea has gone down. I am unutterably lonely in the immense blue silence, and shall occupy myself by writing all as it happened.

The escape from Maedchenbrueste took place before the rising of the sun. There was something eerie and bewitched about that departure. I had lain awake for a time listening to the wind singing through the house. Its voice and all that which made up Maedchenbrueste had gained a peculiar value. Little things I had long ceased to notice claimed my attention. I rose in the darkness, and wrapped my loin-cloth about me. I was happy and yet sad. There was a finality about everything—each simple act would not be repeated. I was parting from all this. I cannot describe the emotion better than by comparing it with that of a really good Christian on his death-bed—joyous with the hope of heaven but inevitably grieved at leaving the familiar world for the mystery of the unknown. I appreciated Maedchenbrueste, loved the place and was loath to part from those who had been my people.

For the last time I went out to the veranda, and saw another day coming to the isle. But I should not be in that day nor of that day. I should not swim, nor fish, nor dig; the crabs would march upon the beach, but I should not see them; the hens would cluck and cackle beneath the house, but I should not hear them. I imagined my dear women pottering about, going on just the same, but without my presence. And I wondered why I fled from these friends and this friendly isle out into the void of the sea. But the canoe was ready laden, and there could be no turning back.

There had been sounds of movement in the house even before I left my room. They were making ready the perishable food which had been left to the last moment. I was glad they were busy, and I fancy they were glad, too. I stood watching the ghostly palms, and trying to review my outfit carefully for the last time ere I cut myself off from all this.

Footsteps disturbed me. I turned. Janet stood in the doorway.

"The fowls are ready—everything is ready!" she said.

"All right," I answered. "I'll get away now. Tell the others and bring the stuff down!"

She gave me a wan smile and went back into the house. I returned to my room, and got my box containing my papers and few possessions. Then I went quickly out of that place, looking at nothing and seeing nothing. The women followed me, but

I did not heed them. For the last time I went down the path beneath the palms. A nut fell, a crab scuttled and the fronds beat and rustled. It was hard to realise that I should never ascend that path again. The rotten vegetation destroyed by the sea gave off a heavy odour.

The beach was silver, the sky was silver, the water was silver. I waded to the canoe—she was anchored to a coral mushroom—untied the rope and towed her in. The women put their leaf-wrapped bundles into the bow, and I brought my box from the beach.

"I think you've everything!" said Janet, head on one side, meditative.

"Yes, I think so!"

The light grew, but it was not real light. It was only the ghost of light. We were all ghosts. The women, mechanically and in silence, had gone back to the beach. I stood in the water holding the canoe, apart from them. I made an effort and looked at each one and thought of each one; I looked at Moira, at Anita, at Ruth, at Janet, at Ann—but they were ghosts, grey shadows, sisters of the mist. They were not six yards away but they had become memories—memories of the days when Maedchenbrueste had been the world—and they made me sad and vaguely unhappy as memories do.

I was shivering. It was all so grey and dim. I should have waited until the sun was high. The women wept. Idle to prolong this! A sense of embarrassment and awkwardness came over me.

Now that the actual leave-taking had arrived I knew not how to be about it. They were five. I was sorry for them, fond of them, but I could not start to go from one to another, kissing each in turn and then escaping from her encircling, clinging arms. And, after all, though we had dwelt so close and so primitively I had kissed only Anita, and that once, long ago. I thought: Queer! Queer—the terms on which I've lived with these women. I could not kiss them; it would have been preposterous to shake hands.

The canoe rocked slightly, tugging at me, bidding me be gone.

Well, something had to be done. The canoe was solid, but Maedchenbrueste and its people were dissolving shadows of the night. I climbed into the canoe, the water dripping from me. The group on the shore moved uneasily. I hauled upon the rope, and the sail went up, flapping. I do not know the terms for these things. I held the line attached to the sail so that the wind filled the big triangle and bulged it out.

"Now I'm off," I said. "Help—within a month. Be of good heart. Till we meet——!"

My voice sounded peculiar. I wanted to go on, to bless and thank them, to explain all that I had felt for them and how strange was this experience and how strong was my hope. There were a thousand things I wished to tell them. But I could not begin. It was time to get away.

They had been looking down at the sand, but at the sound of my voice they raised their heads. I could not see their faces clearly, but a whisper like the stirring of grass spoke my name and said goodbye. Their voices were melted together in the silver air. They raised their hands and let them fall to their sides. I had to blink my eyes, but the people of Maedchenbrueste grew more misty. The palms waved to me. The water slap-slapped along the sides. The distance between us widened. I felt that it was horrible to leave them like this—impossible to leave them like this—but the event was taking place and I could not change it.

"Come back!"

Moira's voice, pitched to a high note of anguish, rang painfully in my ears. She ran forward, holding out her hands. They all ran forward, and took up the call, and now it was like the crying of gulls.

"No," I shouted. "Got to be done! It's all right! Don't be afraid! Keep the beacon going, and be sure to clean the roof pipes before it rains!"

The water raised a silver barrier between us. They stood still and silent now, so that they might have been roughly carved figures set on the shore by some simple tribe to propitiate the sea. I was glad it was over. She went ahead steadily, having passed beyond the shelter of the beach. The sail was full of energy. It braced me. I concentrated on my job, to the exclusion of thought. The light brightened, and the sky warmed.

Once I looked over my shoulder. They were in the same strained attitudes. I waved to them, and they answered me, crying out, also, though I could not hear their words. I knew they wanted me to turn back, but I could not do that. The wind, like the hand of Fate, bore me on. The sea breathed beneath me.

Incredible! Mark Antoine, naked save for the strip of blanket about his loins, sailing away in a hollowed tree provisioned with the fruits of the earth. I had no compass, no fire, no knowledge, no experience. I, Mark Antoine, was as the first man who ever put to sea, before Rome, before Greece, before Tyre, before history. It was so strange that I could not even marvel.

The bow began to lift, and a coconut, shaken from its place, rolled about in the bottom of the canoe. The sun had risen. The reef was near, and the spray drifted in a pearly cloud. Ahead the waves piled, glassy and smooth, and beyond lay the limitless sea. The sky seemed to end it, but I knew it went on and on round the world, lonely and merciless and terrible. At the thought fear sprang upon me. It was so peaceful in the lagoon. I was daunted by the sea. I desired the solid earth of Maedchenbrueste where there were human voices, a fire and a bed, shelter, security and permanence. This was madness, and I sailed to death. I turned my head, hungering for the isle. The women remained in their places, helpless and chained. There

could be no retreat. I could not go back to them ; I could not go back to that life. Finally and for ever I put it behind me. The canoe was almost in the passage. The reef clamoured for a victim. If I was not careful death and humiliation would overtake me before the voyage began. I concentrated on the canoe and the lane of water which led from Maedchenbrueste.

The sea challenged and threatened me, and so, challenged and threatened, I went on.

I am no navigator, but the canoe was alive, inspired. The sea was its familiar, for it had voyaged long with the dead. It met the swells bravely, riding them like a cork. It climbed, and fell down into the hollows, rising again buoyantly. I was exhilarated by the sensation of conflict and achievement. As each roller slid beneath I felt happier. The thunder of the reef roared in my head. I shouted and sang. She ran forward, and, passing beyond the piled waves of the entrance, came to the easy-running ranges of the open ocean.

The wind blew from the south-east. We went almost straight before it. The reef of Maedchenbrueste was on my left side, and the sun's warmth was on my back. I relaxed and looked about, rather dazed by the motion, the voices of wind and water and the adventure on which I was embarked. I saw the lagoon when we were on the crests, but for the greater part of the time Maedchenbrueste was two green hills supported on a belt of rainbow mist. The

palms bent and tossed in the wind. Threads of smoke from the chimney and from the neglected beacon reached out after me. The people had gone from the beach. I could make them out on the veranda, but though they were there the big, white house looked deserted and like a tomb. A window sparkled. I wondered what they would do when I had gone into the sea, and whether they would dig the garden to-day. Maedchenbrueste had the appearance of floating away, of having broken from its anchors. It drifted above the surf back into the sky. It had changed. I admired its beauty, but did not seem to have lived there.

Gradually I became aware of a feeling of satisfaction, almost luxury. This was all right—we were getting along famously—Maedchenbrueste was done with. Yes, I thought, this is not so bad at all. I lay back a little, like a yachtsman, one hand on the paddle, and the other holding the sail. The canoe ran along fascinatingly. I watched the water slipping and swirling by, deep and purple. It flared up at the bows, and splashed on to the outrigger. She was picturesque ; I admired her. I felt drunk with all the intense colour. The green, browns and golds of her cargo pleased me. The sky seemed a deeper blue than it had been ashore. This is damn good, I thought.

Our progress was very lulling. There was a reaction after the rush and excitement of the past days. The lids half closed upon my eyes to shut out the

dazzling world. The rhythm of the wind and the sea stole into me. I was occupied with such trifles as the passing bubbles and smooth curve of the sail, rather than the significance of venturing out across the trackless ocean. The sea was kindly, gentle. The sun shone.

And when next I remembered Maedchenbrueste it was far behind me. Great clouds of black smoke ascended from it. They were piling wet palm fronds on the beacon to call me back. I fancied them at work. I saw Ann coming up the slope with her arms full of fuel, her face showing above it like that of a gnome. I wondered what they were saying about me. I thought tenderly of them, recalling this and that from the past, but my brain did not work very clearly because it was full of the present, the rush of the water, and the feeling that this was damn good.

The canoe went on, pursued by the sun. As the day advanced the wind dropped. I tied the sail, and ate some chicken and the ripest banana. I had only my clasp knife, for I had forgotten a table knife and fork. It did not matter. I am not dainty, and the meat was good. I did not touch the water, for that is precious. Time slipped by. In the middle of the afternoon I had a drink. By then Maedchenbrueste had dwindled from twin peaks suspended on the horizon into misty blurs. It occurred to me that for the first time in my life I was utterly alone —nobody within call, nobody within sight—only

Mark Antoine in that hollowed tree. Occasionally flying fish walked along the water leaving trails of tiny ripples. Their wings glittered. I had never realised how big they were. There was nothing else—only the sea purple and bulging. Bulging! no other word describes the suggestion of those great depths over which the canoe rode. The mass of the waters was such that the mind could not credit that far below—perhaps a mile below—there was the solid globe.

The sun overtook us and went on. I think I dozed. Time passed. The sea ran by—always the sea ran by. Occasionally a flurry of sparkling spray fell on my skin. I had fancied that Maedchenbrueste was like eternity, but this was eternity. We went on, but never moved. I was wrapped about in a great peace which gradually began to worry me. It would have driven me mad once. The sun came down to the sea. I saw the waves against its red face, rising and falling, even as they rose and fell beneath me. It seemed a long way off, and it was sad to think that even so far there was a wave and another wave and another.

The sea was lit for a brief while with glory, and then from either side of me the darkness began to creep up, though astern and ahead the sky was all aflame. Stars appeared. The colours faded. The darkness spread like a fog. The laughter went out of the water, and it sighed. I felt grave and frightened. It was the hour for going home, the

hour to come in from the sea to the village and the fireside, but I could not come in from the sea and for me there was no fireside, no haven. I had to wander on through the great dark.

Longingly, my eyes sought the beacon. Whether they had let it go out or whether it was too far away I do not know, but I could not see it. There was only a great bank of night with big stars boring through. I wondered if they were sitting about on the hill-top, and I learnt how futile were our efforts against the awful spaces of the sea. Stars were all about me—in the black water, in the black sky. I voyaged on without light or sound through space. It was like being dead. I sang for a time, but the thin noise was swallowed up. Hope could not live in such a void, nor despair either. It bewildered me. I was uncertain whether I was asleep or awake.

Presently I began to think: in an hour or so it will be dawn. But I gave that up after a time, and resigned myself to the fancy that the sun would never rise again. I did not care greatly, any more than a man under chloroform cares what happens to his body. The wind blew softly but steadily. I tried to steer by a star, but, indeed, that was not easy, for there were so many stars about me everywhere. I chose a bright star, but there were battalions of bright stars. I kept the wind behind me, and it did not matter.

When I had forgotten the day it returned from the sea, the waters changing from black to dimmest

green. The stars retreated into the pale vault. Light stole back. I was glad, but not so glad as in the first hours of the night I had believed I should be. The canoe sailed along the top of a high, narrow ridge which fell sharply away on either hand into shining valleys. Remarkable, I mused solemnly, but I was not alarmed, though I felt giddy. And as I watched, the ridge subsided without me seeing it do so, and I was on the undulating plain of the sea. The sun came up astern. No Maedchenbrueste! I blew like a speck of foam before the wind.

And that is all. I have eaten a little and drunk a little, and gone on. The breeze died down after noon. It is stirring again now. I do not know what to think. The loneliness is worse than any pain. It grows too dark to write. I do not know what to think. My head aches and my body is stiff. Somewhere there are cities of light and noise, full of people, crowded, dusty, happy. I must remember that. I must remember that.

4

I am caught, trapped. I cannot go back, for I should never find Maedchenbrueste again, and though I go forward it is into infinity. I am as good as finished. It is only a question of how long this living death persists. Oh, God—all this water, all this sky! We call You God of Mercy and yet You created the sea and the sky and man to be mocked by them.

The wave last night swamped two cans with salt water. The saucepan has leaked dry. Soon I shall be shipmates with thirst. Why did I not bury that woman in the kind earth? Why did I fling her into the sea? She had come through all this, but without food, without water, tied down—and I tossed her into the sea. The sun had burnt her into leather, I remember, and she had no face. I could have given her decent burial in the kind earth of Maedchenbrueste.

She had driven along before the wind. And even when she died there was no rest for her. She drove along still. She was like a mummy. She had no face. I wonder if, when the water gives out and the food is done, I shall have the nerve to open a vein? But it will not come quickly—it will gnaw at me gradually, weakening me and sapping me, and I shall feed on hope and have no strength to die. I shall hold on, thinking: perhaps to-morrow! And then another night and another day! O strange! Mark Antoine with no face, driving through the sea. But his shadow among the crowds with a handsome face and a handsome body, smiling and smirking and strutting. They will never know. He will be out here with his white bones thrusting through the leather, and they will love his shadow in its fine linen and fine clothes making love in luxury.

I did not bury her. Why should I bury her? She brought death to me in her death-ship. The dead woman hunted me to drag me to this death. Curse

her! I am glad she is in the sea. She came grinning at me with her faceless face. O, it's a wonder I didn't bury her!

5

That is the truth. The women dead and living have murdered me. I have been thinking since I wrote the last page and now I see it all. They have killed me as surely as if they had cut my throat. It would have been kinder if they had cut my throat or opened a vein—kinder than this death by madness and thirst out on the sea.

If they had never pursued me to Maedchenbrueste I should have been back in the world years ago. When I think of them I see them as they were when they first came. It was the only time I saw them clearly. After that they turned into a kind of mist about me, losing their character and their vice and becoming merely a fog of women in which I wandered, lost to reason. They were cunning—they were cunning right enough. See how patiently they waited. They did not thrust themselves on me, but stood aside and let Maedchenbrueste break me to their will. But it went too far with me to suit them. They had not expected such a drastic effect. And then, before they knew what to make of it, another woman—a dead woman—came along and snatched me from under their noses. She was dead, and she wanted me dead. She has got me. She has won. I suppose she is waiting for me somewhere

without her face, her bony arms ready to receive me.

How cunning they were ! If they had made love to me we should have gone on on the old terms, and I should have been wide awake to them. But they waited for me, put their sex aside until I was ready to crave for it—and even then they missed me !

It is a wonder they did not set the canoe adrift that night ! But, anyway, they have had their revenge. They have murdered me. I scorned them, and now I am condemned to death. May they rot on Maedchenbrueste, may the sea creep over Maedchenbrueste, little by little, day by day, eating that hateful place and them with it, as it will eat me.

6

This day is not so hot, and I am calmer. It is not true that they are responsible. It was a lie to write that—it was dust flung in his own eyes by a fool. All this is my fault ! All this is my doing ! I have run away again. I would not go when courage was needed. I could have built this canoe. I went when courage failed. It was suicide—I always said that. If I had not run away from the world there would have been no Maedchenbrueste ; if I had not run away from Maedchenbrueste there would have been life, not death. I am a fool, and a coward, and a failure. I would not face life ; I would not face Maedchenbrueste. They both beat me. And now the sea has beaten me. I shall not run away from

the sea. I shall not open a vein. My God, if I did I should be picked up next day, drowned in my own cowardly blood.

My death will serve no purpose. They are left alone on Maedchenbrueste, and they will be blotted out by time. I might have been a king in a new world, and I ran away.

7

It would be beautiful to die and be at rest. This can only go on for a few more days. The water is finished and my thirst grows with every hour. My tongue is swelling. It is so lonely. I am old and stiff. I must not waste my strength on writing hereafter, but there are some things which have to be put down briefly though they are most important.

I am not sure what they are. We were so happy on Maedchenbrueste. We were six ordinary sinful folk, and perhaps some of us had been pampered into being worse than most. It was our fault, of course—we should have been stronger—but Fate must take some responsibility. We did wonders on Maedchenbrueste. We might have made it a sty and wallowed—that would have been the natural thing for us to do—but we did not. We were all wiser, better, cleaner. We were—queer to write it now—so respectable. They came there lying and greedy and satiated, and they grew into honest souls working in the garden. We brought the tinsel and sham to Maedchenbrueste, but it was worn from us.

We went back into the Garden which was before men grew so wise and great and proud and rich. We were happy on Maedchenbrueste.

There is no more to be written. I ran away and I have failed. I am sorry, but I do not matter enough for my sorrow to be more than one drop in the ocean. It is a pity. We were happy on Maedchenbrueste.

And now the end to this writing. It is finished, but I shall not write The End, because there is no end, and I shall not open a vein which would be so easy, because there is always hope—not hope while there is life, but always hope. I am a poor man now, but a wise one ; I am stripped naked of pride and civilisation and strength ; I know what I know because I sail on the sea of death. Perhaps I am happy even here on that sea.

CHAPTER XIII

I

I HAD fancied I had done with this writing, for life has crowded in on me again and I have been too busy, but up on the bridge seeing the lighthouse of the world I realised I had a few pages to add to this record of Maedchenbrueste, and I have set myself to write them—the conclusions, the results. To Lieutenant Tait that lighthouse stood for Great Sandy Cape on the Australian coast, and he was pleased because it and the ship were just where they should have been; to me it was the first light of the world—flashing a challenge from the depths of night where the land began—and it set me wondering. Tait knows where his ship is; where am I?

I have come down to the cabin out of which Tait has turned that I may be comfortable. It is small, shut-in and snug. I like it. It remains his cabin, and is guarded by his simple gods. He is red and young, and, having reduced the sea to fathoms, takes H.M.A.S. *Hobart* across it as may be requisite. He is happy, and does not know he is happy; he is wise, and does not know he is wise. His Lords of the Admiralty lay down what he shall do, wear and receive; Custom lays down what he shall eat, what

he shall drink and when, what he shall say, think and believe, and the amusement he shall take. Life is as simple and absorbing to him as it is to the needle of a compass. He is an excellent navigator and has a hearty laugh.

A photograph of his mother looks down on his desk. She is Lieutenant Tait's mother—just that. There are three photographs of a girl, whom I should place as the prettiest and youngest daughter in an English parson's large family. She declares her love for Eddie in a round hand. Former shipmates are ranged beside the mirror, all unhappy before the camera but otherwise as he. The other two pictures are coloured prints—a comic dog drinking from a bottle and showing the effects, and a shapely, if depressed, lady hesitating before a plunge into what appears to be a frozen pool. Books on nautical matters are on the shelf along with a manual on keeping dogs, a couple of Kiplings and an impressive volume, *Beautiful Bombay*. For the rest, tennis racquet, a hockey stick, gun, many boots, uniforms and mysterious boxes.

But that is not what I sat down to write. My mind has been touching these things happily because they are real. We are so unlike, he and I. I rather envy him. He is Lieutenant Tait, but I am Mark Antoine.

Time is short, and I must not delay here while things are happening on deck. Time was an unknown quantity on Maedchenbrueste, but here bells

tell the half-hours as precious things. The ship—throbbing, plunging—rushes us back to the world. Our return seems urgent. She is very busy about it. There are crowds of men, energy, noise, progress, action. We are in such a hurry. The laws of man and the discipline of man reign undisturbed ; the light of the sun is scorned ; the sea is harnessed to the screws ; the tale of our romantic rescue has been flung casually across the horizon. All this has been bewildering and difficult to assimilate after Maedchenbrueste. I have felt like a foreigner. The table trembles beneath my hand with the strength of the turbines. On Maedchenbrueste we forgot the might and majesty of man.

On Maedchenbrueste ! Sitting in this cabin I can see what a power the island had over us, and how it shaped us to its will. It wanted us to stay there, and so created an illusion of isolation greater even than the actual isolation of the sea. In our sane minds we could never have imagined that we should have to dwell there until we died. But the lonely isle wanted us to stay, and laid its spells upon us. Only eighteen months, yet it seems like a separate existence ! Now Maedchenbrueste is further away, more lost than ever civilisation was.

Even my entry into this grey steel world seems distant. The noise disturbing me while I lay in the bottom of the canoe, too weary to move and pressed down by the weight of the sky ; the clear voice which said " Bows ! " and " Weigh enough ! " out

of the empty sea; the grey boat sliding up; the red, sweaty faces peering; the hands walking along the side of the canoe; the great peaceful darkness which came to me—all these things belong to Maedchenbrueste, and that book is closed. I am no longer able to spend time upon such chronicling.

I suppose I might be bitter against Fate for the trick it paid me in sending this Australian cruiser to Maedchenbrueste two weeks after I left there, robbing my sufferings of any practical value. I am not bitter. In my position Tait would laugh; I can smile. Therefore the effort was not wasted. Once I should have cried: My God, the kind of thing that happens to Mark Antoine!—and raged in passion of self-pity. Now I consider myself fortunate to have been miraculously found on the great face of the waters. I am learning to live. I do not seek to understand, and I am not wrath. I do not ask in hopeless woe why the canoe arrived so inopportunely, but I rejoice that the cruiser came to snatch me back from death. That is wisdom. Maedchenbrueste taught me that.

Everybody has been very kind aboard here. They think I am a brave man. I make no claim to that distinction. I cannot profess to judge whether I ran away in cowardice or faced death for the good of us all. The women are sure I was heroic. They have to think that, of course, but I hope they are right, and I believe they are, for no man ever profited by cowardice, and if I had stayed another

ten days we could not have been going to the world with light hearts, nor could we have looked back on Maedchenbrueste as we do—Maedchenbrueste would not have been only a strange, wild place where we were happy. Did I write that the canoe arrived inopportunely? It was a blessing; it was a gift of God; it was our salvation!

I am Mark Antoine again, that notability, that great man, that idol of the crowds. I discovered the fact when for the first time I bathed, shaved, and dressed in the Paymaster's dinner-jacket suit. There in the mirror I saw Mark Antoine reincarnated. He was thinner and black of skin, his eyes were sunken, there were more lines about his face, but he gained by being harder. A new and effective note of sadness and restraint was in him. He was a better hero. I am sure the girl who loves Eddie—and Mrs. Tait, also, for that matter—would declare that if Mark Antoine had lost spirituality he had gained strength. I am not being sarcastic at their expense. Their good opinion is one of my rewards. They might be wrong, but I hope they are right, and I believe they are.

This awakening from the dream of Maedchenbrueste has been full of strange experiences which I should set down if we were still lost in the sea, but I cannot trouble to do that with the ship's bell clanging and the lights of shore winking at us. It has been like being a kid again. I have been dazzled and a little bewildered, liquor has gone to my head,

tobacco has made me cough, and in a thousand more subtle things I have felt keenly and clearly as youth does. I am blasé to nothing. I may look older, but I am younger. Maedchenbrueste did that for me.

The ladies? What shall I write of them? They were so important, so perplexing in the dream of Maedchenbrueste, but they have drifted away on board H.M.A.S. *Hobart*. And yet I like them better now than ever I did. I appreciate that Maedchenbrueste has done as much for them as it did for me. They are wiser, stronger. They know life and death, and they have learnt what gives life value and what is worthless. I do not mean to convey that they are going to retreat into a convent, any more than I am going into a monastery, for that would be to defeat the very purpose of our experience. They are flirting outrageously with the chaps aboard here, and, if I am any judge, are nearer to love than they ever were on Maedchenbrueste. Love was not on Maedchenbrueste, and that is the long and the short of it. If it had been the tale would have been different. Not one of them loved me, nor did I love one of them. We experienced only sex, life using its own weapons to keep the spark alight.

Moira and I were talking about it on deck the other evening.

"It is your lot to be loved *en masse*, Mark," she said. "It's a tragic pity, but it's a fact. As a tribe we loved you; individually we admired and esteemed

you. You had your revenge in the end, because we came chasing the handsome shadow and found Mark Antoine!"

She spoke kindly, sadly. She looked into my face as she said this, and her eyes were soft. Her hand, cool and strong, lay upon mine. It was gracefully done, perfectly done. Moira does everything very well.

The Commander joined us at that moment.

"I wanted no revenge!" was all I had the chance to say.

And then the three of us were chatting. That is the way of life. We have so little time to say and do the things which matter—there are so many distractions and interruptions. Maedchenbrueste was not like that.

To write the truth I dread the plunge which lies before me. The world will never understand our adventure. The world will think our interlude was many things, but it will never guess the truth. There will be smirks, and grins, and winks, and if we say we were happy the suggestions will grow more open. The world will pry and probe and guess, but it will not understand. It knows not Maedchenbrueste. The world is going to do its best to spoil us and our memory, but its guesses and its judgments will be based on its own experience and its own standards, and, now that we are living by these things again, I find it hard to credit our lives on the isle were as innocent as they were. If we had not dwelt there

I could not have remained a week or so aboard this ship with these ladies without the usual kind of thing happening, therefore I cannot blame the world. The fault is mine for being Mark Antoine, and for having been marooned with five women. That, also, is the wisdom of Maedchenbrueste.

I have written that the world knows not Maedchenbrueste. We shall make the name a household word, but while we were there none thought of it. Our disappearances were unassociated mysteries, which puzzled the world for a time and then were forgotten. There was nothing to connect us with the isle or with each other. We had the freedom of wealth. Captain Smyth took his secret with him. The world decided we had killed ourselves, been eaten by cannibals, fallen overboard from ships, or fled to escape the consequences of unknown indiscretions or to indulge in such indiscretions. Our immediate circles of friends remembered and searched and worried and mourned, but for the rest we were nine days' wonders which were displaced by newer sensations. None thought of Maedchenbrueste. How should they? Did not the encircling sea raise its barrier about that secret isle, setting it apart?

Maedchenbrueste! Maedchenbrueste!—how the word sings! A mood which has come repeatedly sweeps over me. I want to be there again. I do not want the world. This serene wisdom will not prevail long against all that noise and turmoil. The

threat of the world curls above me like a great black wave, and I desire that little haven which defied the waves. To go back to Maedchenbrueste, to be happy there, to escape altogether into the Garden where we sojourned such a little time so happily! There was neither wealth nor poverty there, no pride and no stress, no sorrow and no pain, no war and no complexity. It was all simple, direct, clean. The days were full of sun and rain and wind and sea. Peace, driven from the world, had sought sanctuary there. She would shower her gifts upon those who had the wisdom to return.

I am running away again. This ship is no better than Captain Smyth's, no better than the canoe. I have left content behind me. I chase a will-o'-the-wisp, which leads me into the quagmire of the cities, and into all that is cheap and tawdry. I shall return to Maedchenbrueste and to happiness. I have only one life to live, and if there is happiness for me on Maedchenbrueste then why should I not live it there?

This cabin—this vibrating box—is suffocating, as the drawing-rooms of the cities will suffocate me. I must go on deck for a time into the presence of my familiar night. It will not be the night of Maedchenbrueste, but at least it will be wider and freer than this little steel home of Lieutenant Tait's, which is as disciplined and orderly as a prison-cell.

2

I am of a mind to tear out the foregoing pages, but let them stand—let it all stand.

I went on deck. There were people all about, noise and lights and movements. I kept in the shadow. Those who had been my people were dancing on the quarter-deck with the good fellows of this ship. They wore the twill skirts the sail-makers have contrived for them, with monkey-jackets, soft shirts and ties. The impromptu costume was becoming. They were happy with their laughing, gold-buttoned partners. Tait says that this rescue has been "a damned good show." He is right. Everything is so unusual. It is not often this grey ship indulges in romance when she is on the high seas. Ann alone was not dancing. She, hurriedly and of her own volition, has become Lady Moira Tremearne's maid. But I do not doubt she is happy too. She would blush at a glance from the captain —but there are others. Those who had been my people dancing!—not one of them looked bored—not one but was thrilled. The appetite for life is a great possession. Maedchenbrueste has given them that.

I left them dancing and walked forward past the hot funnels. The shore was a purple line against the stars, tipped here and there with light. The water rushed by on either hand, with a swish and a roar. The air was full of the elusive singing note

which a ship makes. Shadows passed, going about their duties. None intruded on my thoughts, for the decorum of the seas is in these men. I stood there looking beyond the bow into the night, the wind fresh on my face. I stood for a long time, and now, at last, I have it all cleared up and sorted out, and have found the simple secret I went to Maedchenbrueste to learn.

I am not going back to that lonely isle. I shall never see it again. Man has no right to seek sanctuary from life. I am going to be Mark Antoine, the film actor, or to accomplish whatever else may be in store. That is the only way to happiness. Some—such as Lieutenant Tait—are born with that wisdom. To them it seems the simplest thing imaginable, and not even worth a thought. Others have to learn it, and the simple things are the greatest things and the most puzzling. We others are set a harder task and are less favoured, but there is satisfaction in mastering the lesson and one values the wisdom the more.

It is my job to be the shadow-lover—the comforter of the unloved in the darkened theatre, the ghost of romance for humdrum folk. There have been higher destinies, but a man might make worse use of his life than to give even passing pleasure to the millions of his fellows. I am the slave of the ladies—so be it! Ah-lee served me well, and was content; Lieutenant Tait serves his ship and that of which she is part, and is content though he does not

know it ; Ann, even Ann, is happy because she is Moira's loyal maid—Mark Antoine goes back to the world to serve also. Many will envy him his lot, but that makes no difference to the question of his happiness, for having attained fame and wealth and all the rest, these things of themselves are valueless to him. Happiness goes deeper than success or dollars. The question is not whether he merits envy or sneers for having been cast for the rôle of the handsomest man, but whether he is right or wrong in going on rather than going back. I say that he is right to go on, and that whatever he goes on to in the end will bring him to peace, content and fulfilment.

Maedchenbrueste astern, the world ahead, the sea about me—and now I go up on deck to dance.

Epilogue[*]

A LETTER from Captain John Anson, master of the Oceanic Steamship Company's s.s. *Pomona*, plying between San Francisco (Cal.) and Sydney, Australia.

s.s. *Pomona*,
At Sea.

Dear Sir,

I am writing in answer to your marconigram at once as I shall be very busy when we reach port.

Please accept my condolences on the loss of your friend. The tragedy of his death was emphasised by the great welcome which, I understand, awaited him in San Francisco only two days' steam away, after his eighteen months on Maedchenbrueste Island.

I am afraid there is little I can add to the wireless reports you will have seen already. At the time the ship was in Lat. 28°—52′ N., Long. 131°—08′ W. The night was clear with a fresh breeze from the south-east and a full moon. A fancy dress ball was in progress. Mr. Antoine—there had been rumours that he would wear a Greek costume—had surprised

[*] I append this letter without comment. The reader is referred to the introductory note.—D. C.

everybody by appearing in a very clever make-up as a circus clown. I have a vivid recollection of the actual happening because I chanced to be watching him at that moment. The band was playing a fox-trot, but Mr. Antoine was not dancing. He was standing beneath a Japanese lantern—his face was painted in a wide grin so that at first we had hardly recognised him—in the midst of a group of ladies, all of whom were in fancy costume, a number as Greek slaves on account of the rumour to which I have already referred. As soon as the cry "Woman overboard!" was raised, he thrust through his admiring circle, and, kicking off his shoes as he ran, leapt to the rail and dived. His mind must have worked with amazing quickness. The band was still playing, and the rest of the passengers could do no more than gasp in astonishment. I saw him for a breath, his cotton pantaloons flapping in the breeze, and then he had gone.

You will understand that with the ship going full ahead the woman—a Mrs. Mary Thompson—and Mr. Antoine were rapidly swept astern. It is a wonder neither was caught in the propellers. I can assure you no time was lost. Word was passed promptly to the bridge, belts were thrown over and the ship was brought round while a boat was being lowered. So promptly had Mr. Antoine acted that there can be little doubt he reached the woman in a very short time. Her recollection is hazy. She remembers struggling madly while he

supported her. The heavy sea must have added to his difficulties.

A great cheer went up from the crowded rails when it was seen that the boat was about to pick up the pair. And then, as so often happens in cases of the kind, when all seemed well the inexplicable occurred. The woman was dragged into the boat by the bow-man, but Mr. Antoine disappeared. The second officer who was in charge can offer no explanation nor can any of the crew. He may have been struck by the boat or by an oar, for as I have said she was in a sea-way, his heart may have failed suddenly, or he may simply have been exhausted by the tremendous effort and collapsed. An able seaman named Hopkins, who is a powerful swimmer, at once dived from the boat. Mr. Antoine, however, had gone down into the sea. The search was continued for some time, but there was no trace of him. At last, most reluctantly, I recalled her. As a tribute to the memory of Mr. Antoine the ship was hove-to and with the saloon passengers still in their costumes a clergyman read a service over the spot where he was last seen. The Rev. gentleman in the course of his remarks pointed out that the text "Greater love hath no man than that he lay down his life for his friend" was most applicable to the death of Mr. Antoine.

Mrs. Thompson recovered. She is a poor widow travelling steerage with five young children, all girls. There has been a great deal of tragedy in her life.

I know she regrets bitterly her mad act, and has learnt a terrible lesson. Having talked with her I am confident that she will do her duty by her children henceforth.

Mr. Antoine was a brave man and my sorrow at his death is most sincere. I shall see that his effects are delivered to your agent on the production of the necessary authority. Assuring you of my sympathy and desire to help you in every way as his executor,

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
JOHN ANSON,
Master.

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